EXCELSIOR

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 1223 00543 9147

DATE DUE

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| SFPL APR 02'82 | | FEB 3 - | 1993 |
| SFPL OCT 22'82 | | MAY 22 | 1993 |
| SFPL JAN 14'83 | | JUL 24 | 1993 |
| | | NOV 24 | 1993 |
| JUL 26 1987 | | | |
| NOV 04 1987 | | APR 26 | 1999 |
| JUL 21 1988 | | | |
| DEC 2 1988 | | MAY 21 | 1999 |
| SEP 05 1989 | | JUN 17 | 2000 |
| DEC 26 1989 | | | |
| APR 30 1990 | | | |
| DEC - 8 1990 | | | |
| DEC 08 1990 | | | |
| JAN 11 1991 | | | |
| FEB 27 1991 | | | |
| OCT 19 1991 | | | |

GAYLORD PRINTED IN U.S.A.

JF

81-19
/

POCK CARD
R000676

811021
/SFX

811021 CSf Excelsior Branch
81-B744

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012

http://archive.org/details/greenfuturesofty00slea

# THE GREEN FUTURES OF TYCHO

OTHER BOOKS BY WILLIAM SLEATOR

Into the Dream
Among the Dolls
House of Stairs
Run
Blackbriar

WILLIAM SLEATOR

# THE GREEN FUTURES OF TYCHO

E. P. Dutton / New York

Copyright © 1981 by William Sleator

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper, or broadcast.

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Sleator, William. The green futures of Tycho.

Summary: When he finds an egg-shaped object with which he travels back and forth in time, 11-year-old Tycho grapples with several futures he sees for himself and his family.
[1. Science fiction. 2. Space and time—Fiction]
I. Title.
PZ7.S6313Gr 1981 [Fic] 80-23020 ISBN 0-525-31007-X

Published in the United States by Elsevier-Dutton Publishing Co., Inc., 2 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016

Published simultaneously in Canada by Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, Toronto and Vancouver

Editor: Ann Durell Designer: Susan Lu

Printed in the U.S.A. First Edition
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

jF

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY
EXCELSIOR BRANCH
CHILDREN'S ROOM
81-19

3 1223 00543 9147

This book, naturally,
is dedicated to my brother Tycho.

# 1

Only a brontosaurus saw the beings drop the thing in the swamp. Once the brontosaurus's small, slow brain realized the beings were neither edible plants nor dangerous enemies, it forgot about them. And so it did not disturb the thing they left behind.

For several million years the thing sank down slowly into the swamp. Then an ocean came and covered everything, and the thing lay under the waves for another eighty million years or so. Later on an earthquake turned the ocean bottom into a mountain, and there the thing stayed for more uncounted years as the mountaintop grew

round and old and small. Finally a glacier picked it up and carried it for thousands of miles, leaving it behind when the ice melted in the sun. And there the thing remained for many more centuries, quite close to the surface of the earth, miraculously undisturbed.

Until Tycho Tithonus decided to make a vegetable garden in the backyard. He dug the thing up with his first shovelful of earth.

# 2

It fell from the shovel and lay glinting on the grass, shiny and new and bright as a polished silver spoon. The metallic sheen of its surface caught the morning light and sent it dazzling directly into Tycho's eyes—or else he might not have noticed it at all.

He bent over and picked it up, then bounced it casually in his palm. "Weird," he murmured. But his mind was on tomatoes and zucchini, and this thing was not quite weird enough to distract him for long. He slipped it into his blue jean pocket and plunged the shovel once more into the earth. And promptly forgot about his find.

3 Tycho was the youngest of four children. His parents, who insisted on being called Bobby and Judy, had named each of their children after a famous person. They had planned what each child would be when he grew up, and the names were supposed to prod the children in the right directions.

Tycho's sixteen-year-old brother, Ludwig Tithonus, was named after the great German composer, Ludwig van Beethoven. He had piano lessons and theory lessons and solfeggio lessons and conducting lessons every week. He practiced the piano for three hours every day. He had

already composed four piano sonatas, three string quartets, seven nocturnes, nine impromptus, and was now hard at work on an opera about voodoo and zombies.

Tycho's fifteen-year-old sister, Tamara Tithonus, was named after the famous Russian dancer, Tamara Karsavina. She went to dancing school for hours every day. At home she slid into splits on the kitchen floor while she talked on the phone. When she lay in bed studying for school, she held her foot behind her ear. She always wore her hair in a bun and talked about dancers named Mischa and Grischa and what injuries they had and how old they were. She was determined to dance *Giselle* before she was twenty.

Tycho's thirteen-year-old brother, Leonardo Tithonus, was named after the great Italian artist and inventor, Leonardo da Vinci. He took life-drawing lessons, and mechanical drawing, and painting and design. He was given a new notebook every month, which he quickly filled with exquisite sketches and brilliant ideas for mechanical devices as well as electronic circuitry. He had three easels, each of which always had a painting in progress on it. He was now engaged in covering the walls and ceiling of his room with a monumental mural depicting junior high school life.

And Tycho, who was eleven, was named after the famous Danish astronomer, Tycho Brahe. Tycho thought astronomy was all right. He liked lying in the backyard at night and looking at the stars. He also liked lying there in the day and looking at the trees. When he was younger he had liked puppets, and they bought him puppets. Then he liked dinosaurs, and they gave him books about

dinosaurs, but now he never looked at them. Now he liked plants. He would not take any lessons after school.

His parents, and his brothers and sister, had never liked him very much.

# 4

"Hey, Tycho! Let me see that thing you found." Plump Leonardo plodded over to the vegetable plot, panting slightly, his glasses fogged.

"What thing?" Tycho said placidly, continuing to turn over the earth in a pleasant, steady rhythm.

"A metal thing you picked up. I saw you put it in your pocket. Let me see it." Leonardo planted himself directly in the path of Tycho's shovel and glared at him threateningly. But the threat didn't mean very much, since Tycho had been growing quickly and was now two inches taller than his older brother, though he did weigh a good deal less.

"You're standing where I want to dig," Tycho said. "Will you please move?"

" 'You're standing where I want to dig,' " mimicked Tamara, who had been doing *piqué* turns across the lawn. She stumbled to a halt beside Leonardo.

"No, he's digging where I want to stand," Leonardo corrected her. "And he won't let me see the thing he found."

"Why don't you go paint something and let me make my garden," Tycho said, moving away from Leonardo and starting to turn over a new row.

"Garden?" Tamara said, laughing. "He'll just dig up the lawn and then forget about it in a week and go on to something else. *I* always finish what I start."

"I want to see that thing you found," said Leonardo, making a quick, awkward hop and settling his full weight down onto the shovel.

"I don't remember finding anything," said Tycho, not letting go of the shovel. Now he really did remember the thing he had found, but he felt a curious reluctance to let anyone else see it. Usually he did not lie, even to his brothers and sister. But keeping the thing to himself seemed more important than telling the truth.

"What's going on back here?" demanded Ludwig, striding authoritatively toward them. He was taller than Tycho, and skinnier, and had shoulder length, black hair that was always falling into his eyes. He folded his arms across his thin chest and stood slouching over the three of them.

"He won't let me see the thing he found, even though I saw it first," said Leonardo, beginning to whimper.

"He's making big, ugly holes in the lawn," said Tamara.

Tycho said nothing.

"All right, all right," said Ludwig, snapping back his head to shake the hair out of his eyes. "One thing at a time. What's this with the digging, Tycho?"

"I'm making a garden," Tycho explained patiently. "I have all the seeds. You have to do it in the spring. And Judy said it was okay."

"Well, if she said it was okay to waste a Saturday morning like that . . ." said Ludwig, shrugging, "I suppose you should get off his shovel, Leo."

"Well, but I saw the thing first," said Leonardo, sniffling as he backed down. He was very emotional. "I saw it first but he picked it up and kept it and won't even let us look at it." He took off his glasses and rubbed the tears out of his eyes.

"Yeah," said Tamara. "I saw it too. *I* always share things."

Now Tycho couldn't restrain himself. "I don't know what they mean, they saw it first," he said. "It's just a piece of metal I dug up with my shovel. It's no big deal. How could they have seen it?"

"He's lying!" shouted Leonardo, crying in earnest now. "I was just coming out of the house and there was this thing there and I said—"

"Hand it over, Tycho," interrupted Ludwig quietly, holding out his hand.

Now there was nothing to be done but show it to them. Perhaps they would lose interest when they saw how ordinary it was, and he wouldn't have to let anyone else touch it. Reluctantly, Tycho drew the thing out of his pocket and held it up for them all to see.

It was nothing more than a silver oval, about the size

and shape of a small egg. At first it had seemed completely plain, with no markings on it at all. Now, studying it closely, Tycho could just make out a series of thin, barely visible lines etched on one end, that looked like dials. And the opposite end now appeared to be a slightly different color from the rest. It seemed to have a faint greenish tint to it.

Ludwig reached for it. Tycho squeezed his hand shut and whipped it behind his back. He took a step backwards.

"I said, hand it over," said Ludwig, taking a step forward and irritably snapping his head, shaking back his hair.

"No," said Tycho, not knowing why, only knowing that he must not give it up. "It's mine. I found it. Leave me alone." He took another backward step.

"It's not like you to be so stubborn," said Ludwig. "You're usually such a pushover. Little wishy-washy."

"Wishy-washy, wishy-washy," chorused the others.

"Come on, kids," ordered Ludwig. "If we all go together, we can get it away from him easy."

Tycho's back was now up against the wooden fence at the end of the yard. On all other sides he was surrounded. They moved closer. "Okay, kids, ready," said Ludwig. "On your mark, get set . . . go!"

Tycho braced himself against the wall. Involuntarily, his hand squeezed the thing, his thumb pressing down against the green end.

They jumped at him.

And vanished.

Tycho cried out, feeling faint, and sank down to the ground, his back still against the wall. They had simply

blinked out of existence, silently, like blown-out candle flames. And the whole sky had become instantly darker, as though a gigantic cloud had suddenly blotted out the sun.

"Oh, no," groaned Tycho, closing his eyes, terrified and bewildered. "Oh, no."

"So there you are, Tycho! Where on earth have you been?"

Tycho blinked. Bobby and Judy reclined in lawn chairs in the middle of the yard, sipping cocktails, as they sometimes did in the evening. And the sky, in fact, was not cloudy at all. It was orange, like a sunset. The sound of Ludwig practicing Chopin floated out across the lawn.

"I see you didn't get very far with your garden," Judy said, standing up and gesturing at the holes in the lawn and the discarded shovel. "You promised me you would stick with it. And then you just disappeared all day."

"But," said Tycho, struggling to his feet. "But I . . . I was just . . ." He shook his head and gave up. Nothing was making sense. He was barely aware of the silver egg, warm now in his palm. Without thinking he slipped it into his left pocket.

Bobby and Judy were both moving toward him now. Bobby was shaking his head. "Can't you stick with anything?" he said. "All those gardening books and packages of seeds. And then you dig three holes and just run away. The kids told us all about it. Now you better fill up those holes and put the shovel away and go memorize your constellations before dinner."

Tycho had no idea at all what had happened, and so he wisely made no attempt to explain. All he knew was that somehow the whole day seemed to have passed in an in-

stant, without his knowing it. Had he fainted and been lying unobserved beside the fence for eight hours? But that was crazy, just as crazy as his brothers and sister vanishing. It was going to take some hard thinking to figure it all out. And he was still a bit frightened. But in the meantime, he had had some unfinished business. Silently, he picked up the shovel and began to dig.

"Isn't it a little late for that now?" said Judy, her hands on her hips.

"Please, just let me finish this," Tycho said. "I'm sorry about today. I just . . . I really do want to make a garden. I mean it."

They sighed, and shrugged, and reluctantly let him dig, and told him to wash his hands before he came in to eat. They went into the house.

Tycho kept on digging and thinking. He knew there had to be a logical explanation for what had happened. All he had to do was put the pieces together, like a jigsaw puzzle. He was so engrossed in his thoughts that he did not notice the piano music coming to an abrupt halt, and soon after that three pairs of footsteps padding across the lawn.

"So you decided to come back after all."

"Running away like that only proves you were wrong."

"What makes you think you have time to make that stupid garden now?"

Tycho pushed the shovel into the earth, rested his foot on it, and gazed speculatively at them. He too, had some questions to ask.

"How did you get away from us like that, anyway?" asked Ludwig, squinting at him through his long bangs.

If they knew he was confused, and trying to get the

answers from them, they wouldn't tell him a thing. He was going to have to be clever about it. "Oh, it was just a trick I learned, in a book I read about guerilla warfare. I guess it must have worked. How did it look to you?"

"You just disappeared," said Leonardo, sounding a little frightened. "We were asking you some questions, and suddenly you weren't there. You went out like a light. We couldn't find you anywhere. So then we just gave up and went back to our projects. And finally Bobby and Judy came in and told us you were back. Come on, how did you do it?"

From their point of view, *he* had vanished. The other difference was that he had skipped a whole day, whereas their day had gone on as usual. That had to mean something.

"Yeah, how did you do it?" demanded Tamara.

"It's really simple," he said. "Maybe I'll tell you someday, if you're nice."

"But where did you go all day, anyway?" Ludwig was still squinting at him suspiciously.

"Oh, nowhere. Just around," said Tycho, beginning to dig again.

"Well, what about that thing you found?" said Ludwig. "I want to see it now."

That thing! He had almost forgotten about it again. The metal thing he had dug up, like an egg, with the dials at one end.

"Yeah, give it to me," Leonardo said shrilly. "I saw it first."

The silver egg he had been squeezing when they had jumped him and then vanished, and suddenly morning had become evening . . .

"If you don't hand it over now, I'll have to tell Bobby and Judy," Ludwig said.

Now the pieces of the puzzle were falling into place. And the solution was incredible, fantastic, marvelous! Was it possible that the egg had carried him eight hours ahead in time, from morning to evening in an instant?

"Oh," said Tycho. He shrugged. "You're still thinking about *that* stupid thing? It was just an old empty lipstick tube. You want it? I guess I still have it." He reached into his right-hand pocket and fished around. Then he grinned sheepishly and pulled the pocket inside out, displaying a huge hole. "I guess it must have fallen out sometime while I was gone. Sorry. It wasn't anything, really." He started digging again.

"You idiot!"

"But if it wasn't anything," said Ludwig, "then how come you were so determined to keep it away from us?"

"Well . . . Just because . . . I don't know. I mean—"

"Children! Time to eat!" Judy called from the back porch.

"Oops, I have to go wash my hands," said Tycho, and he darted away from them. As he sprinted toward the house, he could feel the silver egg still warm in his left-hand pocket. After dinner he would get away somewhere by himself. And then he would test the egg, and find out if the fantastic solution was really true.

And if it was true, nothing would ever be the same again.

5 At supper, Ludwig told Bobby and Judy that Tycho had found a strange object in the backyard which he would not show to anyone. Then they discussed selfishness, and how in a family it is necessary to share things. Leonardo had been reading a psychology book and told them that the youngest child in the family was often the most spoiled. All five of them agreed. Then they discussed responsibility, and how running away from duty was a sign of weakness. Tamara pointed out that she never ran away from duty. At that point Tycho said that he had to finish digging his garden and excused himself.

He dug until it was too dark to see. He was dying to test out his theory about the egg; but every time he looked back at the house, somebody was watching him. And he could not test it until he was unobserved.

After he had put the shovel away and hung up his jacket and washed his hands, he went to his room on the second floor. There was no lock on the door, and when he closed it, he thought of barricading it with his dresser. But closing the door was suspicious enough. To barricade it would be an invitation for the others to break in.

He sat down at his desk and pulled the egg out of his pocket. Under the desk light, the markings on one end were clearer than ever and remarkably complex. And the other end was not merely tinted, but had a distinct greenish glow. It was odd that he had not noticed the glow from the beginning.

Suddenly the door burst open, and he only barely managed to push the egg under a pile of papers. Fortunately, his desk was a complete mess.

"What are you studying so intensely on a Saturday night?" Ludwig inquired, peering down over Tycho's shoulder.

Tycho's vegetable book was open in front of him. "How long it takes tomatoes to get ripe depends on how much sun they get," Tycho explained. "That's why its important to plant them in a place where—"

"Okay, okay, spare me the boring details," Ludwig interrupted. He shook his bangs out of his eyes and began poking around on the desk. "No wonder you never get anything done. You're so totally disorganized."

"Stop it!" said Tycho. "You're messing everything up."

"Messing everything up?" Ludwig snorted, still moving things around. "It's already a complete junk pile."

"That's the way I organized it. I know where everything is," Tycho insisted. He stood up and spread his arms out over the desk, pushing Ludwig away. "Come on, Ludwig. Just leave me alone."

"I just wonder what you're doing that's so secret and important," Ludwig said, "that you have to sneak off by yourself at eight o'clock on a Saturday night." He moved toward the door. "I think I'll just tell Tamara and Leonardo, so that we can all keep an eye on you." He left the room without closing the door.

Tycho didn't know whether or not Ludwig suspected that he still had the egg. What he did know was that his own room was not private enough for what he wanted to do. He sighed and put the egg back in his pocket, and walked across the hallway to the only safe place in the house.

Inside the bathroom he carefully locked the door, then closed the toilet seat and sat down. Once more he examined the egg. After he had studied the markings on the end for several minutes, it became clear that they were arranged in concentric circles. And the circles, in fact, were not merely etched on the metal, they were actually tiny dials, one inside the other. He tried spinning them. They moved effortlessly under his fingers, but stopped, instantly and precisely, as soon as he lifted his hand.

The doorknob turned; then there was a knock. "Hey, who's in there?" demanded Tamara.

Should he answer? It would be more suspicious if he didn't. "It's me," he called back. "I'll be out in a minute."

He gave the dials another careless spin. Then he gripped the egg tightly and, holding his breath, pressed down on the green end with his thumb.

He felt faint.

And then there was sunlight pouring in through the window, summer afternoon sunlight, and there were birds singing, and it was stiflingly hot and humid. Part of the humidity came from the bathtub, which was filled with water that was sloshing over onto the floor. Not only was the tub too full, but Tamara would not keep still, swaying in the water as she swung her right leg back and forth above her head.

Then she noticed Tycho sitting on the closed toilet seat. Her leg stopped. For a moment they just stared at each other.

"Hi," said Tycho, breaking the silence.

Tamara's eyes widened. "Tycho! You monster! Get out!" she shouted.

But Tycho was too excited to get out. The thing had really worked! It had taken him to a different day! The fantastic solution was true!

"Hey, calm down, Tamara, it's only me," Tycho said. "Do you remember what the date is today?"

"The date?" cried Tamara. "What are you talking about? I thought I locked the door. Just shut up and get out. This instant! Out, out, *out!*"

"With pleasure," Tycho said, spinning the dials again. He took a deep breath and pressed down on the green end with his thumb.

He felt faint.

The sunlight dimmed. Sleet and hail slapped against

the windowpane, dark gray in the half-light of an early winter morning. The radiator rattled and hissed in the corner. There was also a thin whistle coming from Bobby, who stood at the sink with a towel wrapped around his waist, sleepily scraping a razor across his chin.

The egg had taken Tycho to another season, perhaps even another year.

His first instinct was to sneak out. Bobby was always irritable in the morning, and Tycho didn't want to startle him. Also a disturbing thought had just occurred to him: How was he going to get back? Hopping around in time like this was interesting, but he still had no idea how the dials worked. If he was ever going to get back to where he had started from, he was going to have to find some time when he could be alone and figure out how the egg worked. But that was proving to be difficult. The bathroom was a popular place.

Then Bobby noticed him. He didn't make a sound, but he did jump about a foot up into the air. He stubbed his toe on the way down and made a big red gash across his chin. "Tycho!" he said hoarsely. "What on . . . How did . . . ?"

"Sorry, Bobby," Tycho said. "I didn't mean to startle you. It was an accident. Just tell me the date and I'll go away."

"An accident?" Now Bobby was wide awake and angry. Blood was dripping from his chin onto the floor. He wiped at it with his hand and made a big pink soapy smear across his face. "You want to know the date?" he said, his voice rising. "What a rotten trick to pull!" He started toward Tycho. "You ought to be—"

Tycho spun the dials, faster and farther than ever. He pressed down on the green end with his thumb.

He felt faint.

And then he looked around and felt even fainter. The bathroom was a wreck. There were gaping holes in the walls and ceiling and floor, and crumbling plaster everywhere. Gurgling exposed pipes jutted out on all sides of him, like horrible worms. Worst of all were the intense green glow outside the window, full of gliding bulbous shapes, and the terrible, unearthly stench, so strong he could feel it on his skin.

He spun the dials back in the opposite direction, gasping for breath. Now he didn't care whom he ended up antagonizing; anything was better than this nightmare.

And it was a relief to be back in the old bathroom again, even though there was someone—hidden by the shower curtain—taking a shower, who would doubtless see him in a moment and be furious. But that would be insignificant compared to the horror he had just escaped. What could it mean: the ruined house and the green sky and the terrible smell? How far in the future was that going to happen? He hoped it was after his lifetime.

But he couldn't worry about that now. He had to figure out how to control the dials and get back to the time he had left, before the person in the shower came out and saw him. He held the egg up to his eye and squinted. But there were no discernible numbers and dates, and the lines were so delicate and complex that he couldn't count them. And it was difficult to concentrate. He kept wondering who was in the shower. The person was whistling in a very familiar way, but it didn't really sound like

Bobby or Ludwig or Leonardo, and it certainly wasn't Judy or Tamara. Who was it, anyway?

Then the water stopped. Tycho knew he should probably leave, but he was too curious. The shower curtain rustled. He looked up.

And saw himself emerging out of the steam.

It was not at all like looking in a mirror. Tycho was sitting down, fully dressed, and his other self was standing up, naked, dripping water onto the floor. And there were other differences. This new Tycho was several inches taller, and more solidly built, and had slightly darker hair. Furthermore, he needed a shave.

He raised his eyebrows, only mildly startled. "Oh, so there you are," he said, in a deep, unfamiliar voice. "I was beginning to wonder when you were going to show up."

"You mean you knew I was coming?" Tycho asked.

"Of course I did. You don't think I'd forget an experience like this, do you?"

"But," Tycho said. "But if you're me . . . I mean if we're the same person, how can we both be here at the same time?"

"No time to explain now," said the other Tycho, bending over him. "I've got to show you how to work this thing, fast, so you can get back to your own time."

"But that doesn't make sense," Tycho said, more confused than ever. "If you have to show me how it works, then who showed you how to—"

"Shut up and concentrate." His older self plucked the egg out of his hand, dripping water onto his shirt. "Now watch carefully. This dial on the outside is seconds and

minutes, okay? And this next one is days and months, and then there's years and centuries, and this one is millennia. Got it?"

Tycho nodded.

"Okay. Now, you have to be very careful and precise, no matter what's happening around you, or you'll just get into a bigger mess than ever. Now watch. Here's how you do it."

Tycho watched, and concentrated. It was vital to learn how the thing worked, and he was fortunate to have someone to explain it to him. Also, though he knew it was ridiculous, he wanted to impress this competent and rather stern version of himself.

"Got it now?" said the other Tycho, straightening up and handing the egg back to him.

"I think so. It doesn't seem so hard."

"Good. Now what was the date when you left?"

"Oh," Tycho said. The date was something he was only rarely aware of. But fortunately, because of the garden, he had been thinking about the date that day and quickly reeled it off.

"Okay, that was, let me see, five years, um, six months, and twelve days ago. What time was it?"

"Oh, I never know what time it is," Tycho explained reasonably. "I always forget to wear my watch, you see."

"Well you're going to have to start remembering," said his other self, sounding annoyed. "Think what would happen if you came back before you left. Then you'd really be in trouble."

"It was after supper," Tycho said. "And it was dark out; I had to stop digging. But it wasn't really late."

"All right, let's play it safe and say nine. You set the dials."

Tycho tried to concentrate, uncomfortably. He felt as though he were taking a test at school. After several long minutes, he held the thing up to be inspected.

"Nope. You made one mistake," said his other self, grimly shaking his head. "Find it and fix it."

"Oh," said Tycho. "Oh, yeah, here it is. Now is it right?"

"Good," said the other Tycho. "But you'd better practice some more before you go on another trip."

"I will."

"And keep track of the date and *don't* forget to wear your watch."

"I won't."

There was a knock on the door.

"Be right out," called big Tycho. "You better get back now," he whispered.

"Okay," whispered Tycho. "Uh, it was nice to meet you. Thanks for the help."

"It was nothing," said his other self, his eyes fixed tensely on Tycho's face. "Good-bye now. And . . . *good luck.*"

Now Tycho understood how the egg worked. But as he pressed down on the green end, he felt less confident than ever. Obviously his older self knew what was going to happen to him. Why then, when he said good-bye, did he look so worried?

# 6

A great deal of activity was going on outside the bathroom when Tycho returned.

Arguing, hysterical voices and heavy footsteps echoed in the hallway. The bathroom door shivered repeatedly as some heavy instrument was pounded over and over again against the lock. There was a scraping noise at the window, and Tycho turned to see Bobby's worried face appear at the top of a ladder.

Tycho stood up. "Bobby!" he said. "What's going on? What are you doing out there on a ladder?"

"What's going on?" Bobby repeated blankly. "Tycho

. . . you mean you've just been sitting there this whole time?"

"What whole time?" Tycho said. How long had he been gone, anyway? It was now nine; what time had he left? He didn't know, so he said, "I better go unlock the door before they break it down."

He unlocked the door and Leonardo almost fell on top of him, wheezing, hammer and chisel in his hands. Judy, Ludwig and Tamara hovered just behind him, looking worried. "Tycho!" said Judy. "What happened? Are you all right?"

"Nothing happened," Tycho said, deciding that all he could do was bluff his way through until he found out what was going on. "What's all the fuss about? I went in, and then Tamara knocked, and then I finished and came out." He shrugged.

"Tycho," Judy said very quietly. "The last time you responded to anyone was a good half hour ago. We've been knocking and calling and trying to get an answer out of you that whole time. We thought you were too sick to talk, or had fainted or gone into a coma or something."

"But . . . but I'm fine," Tycho said, confused and unable to concentrate on how to get out of this mess with all of them watching him so closely. "Nothing is the matter. I didn't faint or anything. I just . . . I didn't realize so much time had gone by."

"In other words, you've just been calmly sitting there listening to us *beg* you to answer. Probably laughing to yourself at the great practical joke you were playing. Is that it, Tycho?" Judy's voice was not so quiet now.

"No, that's not it," Tycho insisted. "I wasn't playing a

joke on anybody. I guess I just blanked out or something. I don't understand it. I just . . . I guess . . ." His voice faltered.

Judy, Tamara and Leonardo were clearly furious with him now. But not Ludwig. He seemed only curious, squinting down at Tycho through his long dark bangs as he tried to puzzle it all out.

Bobby clomped noisily up the stairs and burst into the group, his face red. "All right, explain yourself!" he demanded, panting.

"He has no explanation," Judy said crisply. "He was just sitting there listening."

"No, it wasn't like that!" Tycho insisted.

"Then what was it like?" said Bobby. "Tell us, please. We're waiting."

It was a very bad half hour. If he had been any younger, he was sure they would have spanked him. As it was, by the time he escaped to his room and flung himself miserably down on the bed, he was almost crying.

On the table beside his bed lay his watch, stopped at twenty minutes to two. He felt like smashing it to the floor, furious at the whole concept of time for getting him into this rotten situation. And why had it happened? Because he didn't know what time he had left, miscalculated on his return, and came back a half hour too late.

What he should have done was check the time of his departure and then set the egg to bring him back one minute after he had left. That way, no matter how much time he spent on his trip, he would come back soon enough to be aware of what was going on in the present and not miss anything important. That was the way to

avoid causing, and experiencing, the kind of unpleasantness they had all been going through for the last hour.

He took the watch from the table and carefully began winding it. Only one person had not been frightened and angry, and that was Ludwig. He had been suspicious. And that, of course, was another reason why it was so important to be precise about when he left and when he came back. Already, two unexplainable things had happened to him today. If the others had not been so emotionally involved, they might have been suspicious too, instead of merely ångry. He was lucky that so far only Ludwig was suspicious; but he would have been luckier if no one was.

How much did Ludwig suspect? He couldn't possibly know very much. Still, he had to be very careful not to make any more slip-ups. If Ludwig ever did figure out what was going on, he would be very quick to get the egg away from Tycho and claim all the adventure for himself.

Tycho undressed and got back in bed. Checking with his bedside electric clock, he set his watch to the correct time and carefully fixed it around his wrist. Then he turned out the light. Now, for the first time, he was fully aware of exactly what the egg could do and how it worked. He began to plan.

When he woke up in the morning, he was ready for his first major adventure.

7 The first thing he had to do was put together some sort of disguise.

In the back of his closet, on the floor, he found a pair of swimming goggles, with frames made out of thick black rubber. They did not totally disguise his face, but they were a beginning. Quietly, because it was early Sunday morning and he did not want to wake anyone up, he made his way down to the basement. In the clothes hamper he came across several pairs of Judy's panty hose. He stuffed one pair into his pocket and crept back upstairs.

Now all he needed was something to hide the rest of him. He thought hard. Then he remembered Bobby's bathrobe, a recent birthday present. It was black velour and had a hood, the perfect thing to complete his cover. But how was he going to get it? It was probably in Bobby's closet, in the room where they were still asleep. Tycho was too impatient to wait until they got up—and maybe there was a way to get the bathrobe without waiting.

There was. You are an idiot, not to have thought of this sooner, he murmured to himself, carefully setting the dials on the egg. He checked and double-checked them. Then he pressed the green end, felt faint, and traveled twelve hours into the past.

As he had hoped, the whole family was downstairs, eating Saturday night supper. As he tiptoed across the upstairs hall, the smell of corned beef and cabbage and the mealtime conversation floated up to him from the dining room.

"You're part of a family, Tycho. You can't just live only for yourself," Bobby was saying. "You must learn to share."

Fine, Tycho said to himself. And now I'm sharing your bathrobe.

"I *always* share," Tamara declared.

"So do I," Leo put in quickly. "I offered to paint a whole mural for Tycho, in his room, for a present. He just laughed."

"Now that wasn't very nice of you, was it, Tycho," said Judy.

"It's because he's the youngest," said Leonardo. "I was

reading a psychology book yesterday, about family psychology. It said the youngest one was often . . ."

Just wait until I get through with your psychology, fatso, thought Tycho as he poked through Bobby's closet. He pulled the bathrobe down from a hook and hurried back to his room. He did not want to hear the rest of the conversation. Once had been enough.

He closed the door, checked his watch, and moved ahead twelve hours, back to Sunday morning. Then he cut one leg off Judy's panty hose and pulled it over his head. The stocking gave his face a kind of squashed, dead look. He added the goggles, which hid any expression that might have been in his eyes. And finally the black robe created a wonderfully macabre effect. The outfit was perfect! For a finishing touch, he pulled a huge pair of rubber swim fins out of the closet. He hurried down the stairs and out into the backyard.

He hid behind some bushes near the fence and put on the fins. He checked and rechecked the dials. He remembered to look at his watch. It was a quarter to eight. Just as he pressed down on the green end, he heard a shout from the house. But there was no time to see who it was or to stop himself now.

He felt faint.

And then it was late afternoon, July 4, five years in the past.

The little buds on the bushes were now thick leaves, and the temperature had gone up about twenty degrees. Tycho pushed the leaves aside and peered out into the yard. They weren't there yet. He considered moving ahead an hour or so, but then decided against it. The incident had occurred shortly before they had a picnic sup-

per on the lawn. He would not have to wait very long.

Then the screen door banged and a little girl ran outside. It was ten-year-old Tamara, shorter and plumper, but already with long legs and her hair in a bun. Little eight-year-old Leo tore out of the house behind her, pumping his fat legs furiously but unable to catch up with her. She raced to the big oak tree in the middle of the yard and threw her arms around it. "I touched it first!" she shouted. "I'm the winner."

"Not fair! Not fair!" shrieked Leonardo, plodding to a halt beside the tree. "You had a head start."

"I did not! I just run faster. I'm the fastest one in ballet class. I deserve to win." She did one sloppy pirouette and fell down. Her dancing, if nothing else, had improved in five years.

Then Ludwig sauntered out, whistling, his hands in his pockets. Already his lank black hair was falling into his eyes. He was eleven, but several inches shorter than present-day Tycho. It felt good to be taller than all of them.

"Come on, quit squabbling, you two," said Ludwig. "It's a holiday. Let's have some fun."

"How can we have fun?" pouted Leonardo. "There won't be any fireworks until it gets dark."

"But I have a couple of firecrackers," said Ludwig. "And look who's coming now."

Six-year-old Tycho wandered out of the house, fumbling with a flimsy plastic yo-yo. He would painstakingly wind it up, let it drop. But then it would not come back up to his hand, and he would have to wind it up all over again. The others gathered together, whispering, making plans.

Watching the scene was like studying a magical photo-

graph album, with pictures that moved. But unlike most albums, it did not show only what was pretty or polite. It showed all the miserable details. Looking at it was not a very pleasant experience, but it was addictive. Tycho could not tear his eyes away.

"Come over here, Tycho," cooed Tamara. "I'll show you how to work that mean old yo-yo. I'll help you."

Tycho looked up at her, puzzled. Even at six he could tell there was something artificial about her behavior. But he did want to learn how to work the yo-yo. He handed it to her, not noticing Ludwig and Leonardo hurrying away.

When they returned with an apple, Tycho's eyes were still glued to the yo-yo. He barely looked up at them, and certainly did not notice that the apple had been cored, and a firecracker pushed into the hole. "Can I try it now?" he asked Tamara, reaching for the yo-yo.

"No, not yet, Tycho. It's still my turn. You have to learn how to share things."

"But I thought you were just going to show me how to use it," Tycho protested. "You can play with your own yo-yo whenever you want."

"But I like this one," said Tamara, moving away from him.

Tycho started after her, but Ludwig stopped him with an upraised hand. "Tycho, did you know that I was magic?" Ludwig asked him.

"No, I didn't," Tycho said without interest. "I just want my yo-yo back."

"Wait a minute, Tycho. See this apple?" Ludwig held it up. "I'm going to do magic and make it disappear."

"Huh?" Tycho said. He looked up at the apple skeptically. "How can you make it disappear?"

"I told you. With magic," Ludwig insisted. The others snickered.

Tycho sighed. "I just want my yo-yo," he said.

"If you don't stop talking about that stupid yo-yo, Ludwig won't show you anything," snapped Leonardo. "Don't you want to see the apple disappear?"

"Okay, I'll watch," Tycho said. "Then can I have my yo-yo?"

"We'll see," said Tamara, casually swinging the yo-yo back and forth.

"Now watch, Tycho," Ludwig said. He bent over and set the apple down on the grass. "See? It's just a regular apple, right?"

"I guess so," said Tycho.

"Now look at my hands," ordered Ludwig. "Watch them carefully. Don't look at anything else. These are the magic passes that will make the apple disappear."

In the bushes, Tycho watched his younger self dutifully study Ludwig's hand movements. He also watched Leonardo quickly bend over with a match and light the firecracker inside the apple. He wanted to interrupt now, but forced himself to wait until the right moment.

"Okay, now watch the apple!" Ludwig cried out, stepping back and moving his hands faster. "Abracadabra, Kabam!"

The apple exploded with a sharp crack, its tiny fragments flying to the edges of the yard, so that it almost did seem to disappear.

"Oh, what wonderful magic!" Tamara cried shrilly.

"*Now* can I have my yo-yo?" Tycho said.

"Is that stupid yo-yo all you can think about?" Ludwig demanded, angry now. "Didn't you see what just happened?"

"You blew up the apple with a firecracker," Tycho said blandly, obviously unimpressed. "After all, it is the Fourth of July."

Now Ludwig was furious that Tycho had seen through his little trick. "So it doesn't interest you to see an apple disappear, huh, Tycho?" he said. "Well, then, let's just try something else. Give me that yo-yo, Tamara."

"Wait a minute, what are you going to do?" Tycho said quickly, reaching out.

"Grab him, Leo," Ludwig ordered.

Leonardo grabbed Tycho's arms and pinioned them behind his back. Tycho struggled, but could not get away.

"Watch this, Tycho. *This* should impress you," Ludwig said, as he stuffed two firecrackers into the crack in the yo-yo. He set it down on the grass and brought out a match.

"No, Ludwig, please," Tycho begged him, writhing furiously in Leonardo's grip. "Not my new yo-yo."

The moment had come. Expertly Tycho spun the dials, traveled back one hour, hurried across the empty yard. He reset the dials and moved one hour ahead, returning to the moment he had left.

What the others saw was a tall figure in black suddenly materializing out of nowhere.

Tamara screamed. It was one of the loveliest sounds Tycho had ever heard. "I have come!" Tycho cried out. He lifted his hands above his head and turned to stare at each

of them in turn, his strange, squashed face inside the stocking wrinkling into a kind of smile. "You called me, and I have come."

"Who . . . who are you? Where did you come from?" asked Ludwig, failing to sound tough. "Go away. This is our yard."

"But you called me, and now I cannot go away." He lurched around on the fins. Ludwig, Tamara and Leonardo backed away slightly. "I cannot go away unless I take one of you with me," he growled.

"Take *him!* Take *him!*" squealed Leonardo, terrified, pointing at little Tycho.

"No!" Tycho bellowed, raising his arms again and stretching himself up on his toes. "Never that one. He is the special one, he is to be protected." Little Tycho watched him numbly, his mouth open, while the others exchanged worried glances. Tycho hunched over inside the black robe and twisted his hands together. "The rest of you can be toyed with. You have no destiny." He approached Ludwig and leaned over him. "How about you? Would you like to come with me?"

"No!" said Ludwig, then added quickly, "I'm not afraid of you. You're just somebody dressed up, trying to scare us."

"Oh I am, am I?" Tycho said softly. He was prepared for this. He pressed the green end and traveled ten seconds into the future. To them, he vanished for ten seconds and then reappeared. If they had not fully appreciated his first appearance, this disappearing and returning act would make up for it.

It did. They were nearly in shock now, on the verge of

running away. There was not much time left. He turned to his former self, who was trembling, as frightened as the others. "But you need not be afraid," he said, as gently as possible. "Especially not of them." He gestured contemptuously, then bent over and handed Tycho the yo-yo. "There is nothing they can do to you. You are special, set apart. Your destiny is dazzling, marvelous! Wait and see."

He spun around to the others, who were huddled in a pale little group. "And as for you, my fine little fiends! Your charming games have prepared you well for *your* unfortunate destiny. But I am kind. I will let you off this time, and not take one of you away with me. Next time, I will not be so lenient. Till we meet again!" With one arm he made a gesture of farewell, then traveled eight hours into the future.

The sun blinked out. It was the middle of the night. Tycho was out of breath, his heart pumping heavily. He sank back against the tree, exhausted.

As he calmed down a bit and the adrenaline rush was gone, he did not feel particularly satisfied. He pushed himself away from the tree and walked slowly to his hiding place in the bushes. What *had* been the result of the little spectacle he had just pulled off? And what were the long-term effects of his interference with the past? He had prevented the yo-yo from being destroyed. Could it have made any changes in the present?

The questions were far more complicated than he had imagined, and bewildering. He did not want to think about them now. He only wanted to go back to the humdrum present, to solid, comfortable reality where he could dig his garden. The enigmas of past and future could be solved later on.

Fortunately the moon was bright enough for him to see the dials. He set them carefully. Then he pressed down on the green end, felt faint, and returned one minute after he had left, fourteen minutes to eight on Sunday morning.

Then he remembered the shout he had heard as he left. Squinting in the sudden bright sunlight, he crouched down behind the thinly budding branches and looked up at the house. Ludwig was peering curiously out of an upstairs window. In a moment he disappeared.

Tycho tore the goggles off his head and ripped at the stocking, which split in half. He struggled to pull the pieces away from his face, then dropped the robe to the ground and kicked off the fins. As he hurried toward the garden plot, he shoved the egg into his pocket. Oddly, he had trouble squeezing it in, as though it were the wrong shape. These were the same pants he had worn yesterday, and the pocket had swallowed it up then. But he had no time to wonder about it now. When Ludwig ran out of the house, Tycho was down on his knees, crumbling the earth between his fingers.

Ludwig's long, early morning shadow fell across the patch of turned-over soil. He kicked some dirt over onto Tycho's arm and said, "Where were you a minute ago?"

Tycho looked up at him, narrowing his eyes. "What do you mean, where was I?" he said. "I was right here. What about it?"

Ludwig shrugged and cracked his knuckles. "Oh, I don't know. I just thought I saw something funny out here, that's all." His eyes wandered toward the bushes.

Ludwig had seen him in the bushes. There was no way Tycho could pretend he hadn't been there. If he lied,

Ludwig might go and look and see the costume, and that had to be prevented. Tycho sat back on his heels. "Well, I did go back and poke around in the bushes to see if the earth was any richer there. I thought I might bring some over if it was. But it looked the same. Since when are you so interested in gardening?"

"I couldn't care less about gardening," said Ludwig, looking down at him steadily as he cracked his knuckles again. "But I do care about the weird things that have been happening. You're hiding something; don't think I haven't noticed. I'm going to find out what it is."

"You're nuts," Tycho said casually, turning back to the earth. He waited. Was Ludwig going to go away, or was he going to check the bushes? *Hurry up*, Tycho urged him silently. But Ludwig just stood there, cracking his knuckles, whistling an irritating, high-pitched tune.

"How come you keep cracking your knuckles like that?" Tycho asked him.

"Why shouldn't I? I've always done it."

"You have?" Tycho said, feeling an odd twinge. "Funny, I never . . . Oh, well." He stood up and brushed off his hands. He hated to leave the bushes unguarded, but it was the only way to kill Ludwig's suspicions and get rid of him. "Time to start planting," he went on. "I'm going to go get my seeds. Do you want to help?"

"No thanks," said Ludwig. He ran a hand through his bristly crew-cut hair. "I have to practice, and I don't think mud on the keys would help." And he went back into the house at last.

Tycho felt uncomfortable at breakfast, tongue-tied and a bit dazed. It had to be because of the strange adventure

he had had so early in the day. He was ravenous, and devoured three helpings of sausage and mushrooms on toast, and two large pieces of coffee cake. He spent the rest of the morning planting seeds. He made a point of yawning several times at lunch, and mentioned that gardening in the sun had made him sleepy. When he had finished his peanut butter and salami sandwich, he went up to his room, closed the door, and lay down on his bed. He pulled the egg out of his pocket.

And then he was sitting up, feeling his stomach contract and his pulse pounding in his ears as he stared down at the thing in his hand. He blinked and shook his head, but his eyes were not playing tricks.

The egg had changed.

8

The green end had become sharply faceted, like a jewel, and the color was more intense than it had been. The dials were clearer now. They no longer looked etched into the metal, but had dimension and relief. And wrapped around the middle of the egg was a thin glittering filament.

Tycho pored over it carefully for several minutes, not even trying to think. Then he forced it into his pocket and stretched out on the bed. He couldn't begin to imagine what this sudden metamorphosis might mean. Sophisticated though it was, the egg must be some kind of

machine, and machines do not spontaneously change.

Did that mean it was more than a machine? Could it be alive? But it didn't eat or breathe or try to communicate, as a living thing would do. There was more to the thing than he might ever be able to comprehend. This thought only added to the confusion he felt about the possible effects of interfering with the past. And what about that horrible future he had visited in the bathroom, with the green bulbous shapes and the ruined house and the awful stench? What was that all about, and how distant was it? What was he getting himself into?

The gardening really did seem to have made him sleepy. He closed his eyes and soon drifted off. The voices in his dream were like music, the stories they told weaving an endless silvery tune. The dim vistas and the figures moving through them were only half-seen, drifting colors and shapes. What was so beautiful and so seductive was that it did not matter that he could not understand what they were telling him. It did not matter at all.

A brutal thumping sound and an unpleasant ordinary voice dragged him away from the dream. He opened his eyes to find Tamara standing in the doorway. "Come on, Tycho, get up," she told him. "Judy says you can't sleep all day. You still have your chores and studying and projects to work on." She glared at him, then pushed her head forward aggressively. "Come on, Tycho, you can't just lie there all day. Get up!"

Tycho rubbed his eyes and peered at her from the pillow. Something was wrong. He felt more dazed than ever as he sat up slowly. "Tamara," he said huskily. "Since when . . . since when did you have braces?"

"Huh?" she said, wrinkling her forehead at him. "What's the matter with you? I've had the stupid things since I was thirteen."

"Have you?" he said. Now that he was beginning to be wide awake, the braces did not seem strange after all. "Oh, that's right. Funny, that I would forget something so obvious."

"*Obvious?*" Tamara lifted her carefully drawn eyebrows. "Thanks a lot, Tycho. That makes me feel great."

"But I didn't mean it that way."

"Yes you did." She was almost crying, which was not like her. "Why do you always make fun of me? You know how self-conscious I am about my braces. I'm telling Judy." She turned and flounced away.

He spent the rest of the day in the basement, cleaning and polishing and adjusting his telescope. It was an activity he knew would mollify Bobby and Judy, and he wanted the dust to settle. He had allowed too many odd things to happen. He had to be very careful now not to give anything else away. After dinner he even remembered to steal out into the yard, get the bathrobe, and smuggle it back into Bobby's closet without being noticed—and without using the egg.

From now on, he decided, he would only use it late at night, after everyone had gone to bed. That way, sudden comings and goings would be less noticeable. And he would also have something to look forward to every day. And tonight he would do something purely for fun, that could not possibly have any serious repercussions.

He lay awake in bed for an hour that night, then got out his flashlight and burrowed under the covers. The dials were easier to work now, and he set them with great

care. Then he forced himself to wait there, restless in the darkness, for a while longer. This jump could not be made from inside the house, and he had to be sure no one heard him go outside.

As he waited, he went over his plan again and again, until he had convinced himself he was not making another mistake. The past had already gone by; it was probably just as well not to mess with it. His past in particular had been miserable. He knew what had happened. Why dwell on it?

The future, on the other hand, was new, uncharted territory.

He had often wondered what he would be when he grew up. His brothers and sister had always known, and were devoting their childhoods to preparing for their careers. That situation had only exaggerated Tycho's vagueness about his own vocation. But recently he had come to realize that what they called "wishy-washy" might really just be an interest in a wide variety of subjects. There were so many fascinating things in the world, so much to choose from. What was his choice going to be?

Something about this new adventure gnawed at him, but he pushed it aside. After all, he wasn't doing anything dangerous, like interacting with the past, which might have unexpected effects on the present. What harm could a little peek at the future do? How could he change anything there? And it would be so much fun! What would buildings look like then, and cars? What kind of clothes would people wear? What would airplanes be like, and television?

Only twenty-five minutes had gone by, but he couldn't wait any longer. Slowly, slowly he slipped down the

stairs, pausing to wait and listen at every creak. He heard the faint jingle of a bedspring, a delicate snore. But no voices, no lights, no footsteps.

He leapt across the backyard, free in the moonlight. He was traveling too far this time to hide in the bushes—they might have grown so much that there would be no room for him. He crouched behind the oak tree instead. Again he checked the dials. In twenty years he would be thirty-one, certainly old enough for something interesting to have happened to him. But twenty years was still not so far away that everything would be completely alien. The outfit he had picked—sneakers, blue jeans, and a T-shirt—had been an unobtrusive way to dress for decades, as far as he could tell from old pictures. It was likely that in twenty years the same clothes would not be noticeably old-fashioned.

If Bobby and Judy had moved, he would have a serious problem trying to find himself. But he was pretty sure that they would still be here. They loved this house, regarded it as their permanent home, were settled and happy in it, and had not nearly finished paying for it yet. And if they had moved, and he couldn't find out what had happened to him, then he could just come back, with no harm done.

Then what was gnawing at him?

Nerves, he told himself, because his last adventure had not worked out exactly as he expected. He was more experienced now. This time nothing would go wrong.

He pressed down on the green end and felt faint.

And jumped into the future, twenty years and twelve hours exactly.

9

The sun went on like a light, and Tycho squeezed his eyes shut against the sudden brilliance. Impatiently he waited while they adjusted, then opened them slowly.

The bushes had grown, luxuriantly. He would have been impaled if he had been standing there. He stood back to look up at the oak tree, taller now, and casting a wider shadow over the lawn. There was even a vegetable garden, which someone had evidently just planted, larger than the one he had started twenty years before.

Then he caught sight of the house and had his first

shock. It had always been a rather rakish yellow, but now it was a dark, respectable green. He didn't like it. Still, there were probably no children living here anymore. Perhaps dark green was an appropriate color for two elderly people.

After making sure no one was nearby, he stepped out from behind the tree. He had calculated carefully before he set the dials, and knew that this day in this year was a Monday. Bobby and Judy, in their early sixties now, would probably be at work. They were not the types for retirement.

As he moved toward the house, he caught a glimpse of a strange green bubblelike thing in the yard next door. He would have liked to go and look at it, but didn't want to risk getting caught by anyone and having to run away before he completed his mission. Later on he might have a chance.

He pulled open the back door, luckily still unlocked, and listened. He heard nothing. He pressed the doorbell—if anyone came to answer it, he could hide, and see who it was, and then come back later. He waited, but no one came. He stepped into the kitchen.

His first impression was metallic. The walls, the ceiling, the floor, and the appliances—if you could call them that—were all of the same material, something that looked like silvery gray metal. The whole room, in fact, seemed to be made in one piece. The table and chairs, counters, cabinets, sink, stove, and refrigerator all grew out of the floor and walls with no sharp corners, only gentle curves flowing from one shape to the next.

It was like being on the inside of a sculpture. He even

had the feeling that he was not allowed to touch any part of it—and so naturally he could not keep his hands off. The egg-shaped thing that must be the refrigerator had no handle and no observable door on it. How did one open it? He ran his hand over the surface, which was silken and pleasantly warm, not like metal at all. Nothing happened. He tried again, with more pressure. The surface yielded like a balloon filled with water, there was a gentle pop, and the whole front of the thing swung toward him. Inside, too, it was all molded curves. He recognized apples and carrots and lettuce, but there were also oddly shaped containers holding unfamiliar substances. He dipped his finger into something blue and fluffy and tasted it. An intense flavor of plums and raspberries and subtle spices exploded inside his mouth. The stuff was delicious! He took another taste, then stepped away. Quietly the door sealed itself.

The rest of the house was not as spectacular as the kitchen. There was no doubt that Bobby and Judy still lived here, for the rugs and furniture were for the most part the same. They had been slightly shabby then, and they were slightly shabbier now. There were a couple of weird things that were probably lamps, and the houseplants in the sun-room were mostly unfamiliar, with huge improbable blossoms in rainbow colors. There was no television, but there was a five-foot-square gray screen, hung like a painting on the living room wall, that was probably the television of the future. He could see no controls, and after stroking the thing for several minutes with no results, Tycho gave up. He still had to find out what had happened to himself, after all. He went upstairs.

Except for the fact that it was unrecognizably neat and looked as though it hadn't been used in years, his own room was basically unchanged. Ludwig's, Tamara's, and Leonardo's rooms were also much as they had been. The information, as Tycho had expected, came from Bobby and Judy's study.

There was a picture of the two of them on a dresser. They were white-haired, but very tan and holding tennis racquets. Obviously they were still as healthy as ever. Judy still handled her correspondence from the same old desk, but she did have a new typewriter. There were no keys, only a flat slanted panel with letters and numbers printed on it. A half inch of paper protruded from a slit at the top of the panel. He touched the letter *a*, and even before his finger had made full contact with the panel, there was a silvery flash almost too quick to see, and *a* was printed on the paper. It was amazing! Without thinking, Tycho typed out a message. What appeared on the paper was:

Dfer Jyudhy;kI loike ½ypour nrew
typowreityer¢@/// lpove 7 Tychio

The thing worked fast, but it certainly was easy to make mistakes on it.

He smiled at the thought of Judy's reaction to the message. But the smile faded quickly. She wouldn't think it was cute. She would think that someone had broken into the house and gone through her possessions. As a result, she might very well start keeping the door locked. The locks were probably different now, and his old key from

twenty years ago wouldn't work. He would never be able to get back in here again. And sometime he might really need to get back in here; it might be terribly important. He mustn't lock himself out. He pulled at the paper but it wouldn't move. It was too tough to tear. He searched the panel and finally guessed that the strange symbol in the lower right corner might possibly resemble a pair of scissors. He touched it. The strip of paper neatly detached itself and fell into a little rack behind the slit, while another piece of paper appeared in its place. Tycho shoved the message into his pocket.

The best thing would be to find a letter from himself. In case he hadn't written, he could find out where he lived from an address book—though an address alone wouldn't tell him very much about himself, especially if he lived in another city and couldn't go visit the place. A letter would be the best. He would have to remember to write to Judy when he grew up. If he kept reminding himself, and remembering from now on, then there would certainly have to be a letter here somewhere.

There was. She still used the same cubbyhole for storing letters received, and in a moment Tycho came across an envelope with *T. Tithonus* scrawled in the corner. He pulled it out, then sank back in the desk chair, suddenly feeling frightened. Now that he was on the verge, he wasn't sure he really did want to know what was going to happen to him. What if it was something horrible? It might be better just to put the letter back and get out of here.

But he was too curious. He braced himself as if he were opening his report card, and pulled the letter out. His

handwriting was worse than ever, in thick green, and the message was brief:

*Hey Ma,*
*Thought you might get a wriggle*
*out of the new stationery. Keep*
*your fingers crossed. See you soon.*
*Love, T.*

That didn't tell him much, but the stationery did. LUNAR ENTERTAINMENTS, INC. it said in silvery green letters at the top of the sheet. Underneath that was a brief list of names and titles, including Tycho Tithonus, Artistic Engineer. The address below the names, amazingly enough, was in the same city.

Tycho let the piece of paper slip out of his hand. *Artistic Engineer, Lunar Entertainments.* What could it mean? It certainly sounded interesting. Perhaps he should go visit the place and find out what it was all about.

But how would he get in? What excuse would he use? What if someone recognized him? What if he recognized himself? It would be safer just to stay here and poke around some more, and then go back to his own time and go to bed.

But he couldn't resist. LUNAR ENTERTAINMENTS was too seductive to pass up. And he knew that if he didn't go now, he would have to come back some other time and find out what it meant. So it might as well be now. He put the letter carefully back, and in a moment was downstairs and out the front door.

The street had not changed much in twenty years. The lawns were patchy and overgrown, and many of the

houses in need of repairs, he noticed. The strangest thing about the cars was how tiny they were. They were not streamlined and futuristic, but rather like square little boxes on wheels. They all gleamed, as though they had been recently waxed, and were painted strange pale pastel tones of pink and lavender and green. But if he squinted, the street seemed almost the same. Except . . . the trees! That was the major difference. Many of the trees were gone. So many, in fact, that the street no longer seemed shady and inviting.

He forgot about the trees when he left his own neighborhood. At the first major intersection, he hopped on a bus that looked like a fat transparent light bulb and headed downtown. He wondered briefly how much a bus ride would cost these days, but then noticed that no one seemed to be paying. So he sat down on the amazingly comfortable padded bench, and gawked like a country boy on his first visit to the city. He certainly didn't have to worry about looking old-fashioned or out of place. There was an incredible diversity in the style of dress. No one paid any attention to the girl across from him, who wore a bikini top, a floor-length fur skirt, and had a pink crew cut. The man beside her wore a long hooded robe of bright red satin, and the woman behind him had on a tunic that could have come from ancient Greece. Next to Tycho sat a young man with a two-foot-long blond braid, who had nothing on but a loincloth. There were other people in beads and leather and silk. Tycho felt comfortably inconspicuous.

He finally managed to tear his eyes away from the people to look at the city outside the transparent walls of the

bus. The style of architecture was as diverse as the style of dress. The gleaming spires and transparent domes of science fiction were there, as he had imagined. But there were also multicolored Greek temples, half-timbered houses, medieval stone towers. He passed a skyscraper he remembered, a blank mirrored rectangle. Now a gigantic thatched roof was perched jauntily on top of it, bringing it up to date.

The familiar building reminded him to think about where he was going. He got off the bus at the next stop and wandered dizzily for several blocks. It was like being at a costume party in an amusement park designed by a madman. He had to keep reminding himself not to stare too much, and to concentrate on finding the address.

The building he found looked like a gigantic perfume bottle made out of green crystal. Gargoyles of apes and toads squatted grinning over the entrance. The door was a twenty-foot transparent disc that revolved constantly. The people streaming in and out did not seem afraid that they might enter at the wrong moment and be crushed when it swung shut, so after watching for a while and trying to get the rhythm of it, Tycho hurried safely through.

Green transparent tubes were ranged around the main hall, and inside them lighted bubbles floated up and up until the tubes curved away or disappeared in a green haze high above. Glowing letters in the wall indicated the destination of each tube, and after a brief search, Tycho found the one marked LUNAR ENTERTAINMENTS. He approached the tube with some trepidation. A round door opened automatically and he stepped inside. And then he

was in his own little egg-shaped capsule being silently wafted upward.

It deposited him in a circular reception room. The walls and ceiling were covered by an incredibly realistic photomural of a barren rocky landscape and a black sky with bright stars. Above the center of the room hung a perfect replica of the earth, four feet in diameter, glowing green and blue, and wreathed in clouds. A woman sat enclosed in a circular desk below it. She wore a skintight silver suit and had a silver crew cut that looked more like metal than human hair. Her eyebrows and fingernails and lips were also silver. Tycho approached her cautiously, gripping the egg in his pocket in case he should decide to run away. What was he going to say to her?

Then she looked up at him. "You're late," she said crisply, glancing at the calendar on the desk.

"Late?" said Tycho, baffled. How could they be expecting him?

"Well you did come for the performance, didn't you?"

"Oh, yeah. Sure," Tycho said.

"Well, Mr. Tithonus has already started his introductory talk, but the actual transmission hasn't started yet. Just try to be quiet when you go in, will you?" She looked him over and almost smiled. "I do love that little boy look," she said. "No wonder everyone's doing it. And I must say, you do have the figure for it. Where did you ever find those pants?"

"Oh," said Tycho. "Um, thank you. I got them . . . it's a place called Army Surplus."

"Army Surplus," she said. "Quaint. I'll have to remember that. You can go right in now."

She touched a panel on the desk, and an opening appeared in the wall behind her, just wide enough for Tycho to squeeze through. Within was a small, dark auditorium, with steeply banked rows of seats facing a carpeted, brightly lit platform with a large screen behind it. Tycho found an empty seat in the back row without attracting any attention.

The man on the platform, dressed in Space Age silver like the receptionist, was clearly himself. For a few minutes, Tycho was too absorbed in just looking at him to pay any attention to what he was saying. He was disappointed, though he tried not to admit it. The man was paunchy and out of shape in the skintight suit, not in the least like the astronaut he was obviously intended to resemble. His grown-up but familiar features looked tired and a bit puffy, and he spoke through a fixed, artificial smile. He paced and fiddled nervously with something in his hand, probably a control device for the lights and the screen. Tycho wished he would put it down.

". . . this brief description of some of the technical problems, only to help you appreciate more fully what you are about to see. It's expensive enough to build video stages on the earth. On the moon, the cost becomes positively, well . . . astronomical." He chuckled at his own joke and then waited for the audience to laugh, but there was no response. "Uh . . . not only does everything have to be shuttled up there at enormous expense, but it all has to be built in a vacuum, everything airtight. As for the dancers, well, of course they have all been trained on the earth. We can't just bring them to the moon, have them perform, and bring them back. They have to live there for

months and months, practicing, getting used to dancing at one-sixth gravity, before we can even think of broadcasting anything. As you know, accommodations on the moon are tight, and terribly expensive. It's been a monumental investment, and unfortunately some of that is reflected in the prices we are charging for the syndication and rental of our shows. We know there has been some comment on our high rates." He cleared his throat uncomfortably and passed the thing he was holding from one hand to the other. "Therefore, we felt it was important for potential distributors and sponsors to understand why we are forced to charge so much.

"However, what you are about to see is so spectacular, so unique, that we are sure you will find it well worth the extra expense. There has never before been anything like this, in the whole history of entertainment. Weighing one-sixth of what they do on earth gives our performers, well, totally unlimited freedom and control over their bodies. But enough said. I know you're all impatient, so we'll go right ahead with it now. We'll start with something classical, a kind of introduction to this new art form. Then we'll go on to more contemporary pieces. I'll make a few explanatory comments as we go along. And remember, this is a live transmission from the moon. There are no special effects. Thank you."

He bowed slightly, obviously asking for applause. When it came, the applause was halfhearted and brief, but he stood there grinning and soaking it up until the last faint clap died away. Tycho wanted to cringe with embarrassment for him. At last, to Tycho's intense relief, he sat down. He must be having a bad day today, Tycho told

himself. I would never act like that unless something was really going wrong.

The lights went out; color flashed across the screen. There was a fanfare of electronic trumpets creating vast unearthly echoes, and the words *Lunar Entertainments, Inc.* appeared in dancing green flames. Then the screen went black, and there was only a pair of feet against the darkness, in pink toe shoes, standing in fifth position. There was something very familiar about those feet.

Then the feet went up on point and began *bourée*ing around in tiny little steps, and the music began. It was a plain old-fashioned acoustical orchestra, playing the second act of *Giselle*. Tycho recognized it immediately, with a slight feeling of nausea. Tamara played that music so much that even Bobby had once left the house at the sound of the first note.

The camera pulled back, revealing the entire dancer, who was, in fact, Tamara. She was thinner and wirier than ever, and there was a certain tightness about her mouth and eyes. Still, she looked much the same. So she finally did get to dance this part after all, Tycho said to himself. I bet she never thought she'd be doing it on the moon.

As yet, the location had made no apparent difference in the dancing. Tycho remembered this scene. Giselle had died in the previous act, and was now a ghostly, will-o'-the-wisp kind of creature, in a long white tutu, dancing with the man who had betrayed her. Tamara had explained the logic behind the dancing. Each time the man lifted her, the orchestra would stretch out one long note, holding it until her foot touched the ground again. The idea was to emphasize her airy, spiritual nature.

The man lifted Tamara. He stretched his hands above

his head and gave a gentle push. And up Tamara went, and then up and up, as the orchestra held on to the note and the camera pulled back. But the man still disappeared below her as she kept floating up, with a dreamy sad half-smile on her face, slowly waving the lily in her hand, casually flapping her pointed feet. The orchestra kept holding on to the note, interminably (the poor oboe player must be nearly dead by now, thought Tycho), as Tamara gradually drifted to a stop, paused for a moment in mid-air, and then began her descent, her skirts fluttering gently as she accelerated downward, her eyes gazing wistfully up to heaven. The note went on, wavering, as the man caught her, held her effortlessly in a long, graceful pose, and brought her down at last. The camera zoomed in on her foot again as it delicately made contact with the floor; and with an audible gasp, the orchestra went on, finally, to the next note.

The gasp that went up from the people in the audience was very audible indeed. Like Tycho, they all seemed to have been holding their breath. The gasp became a murmur and then an excited buzz as the lifting and tossing of Tamara was repeated again and then again. As the scene ended, she tossed the flower at the kneeling man, who didn't even try to catch it because it just went up and up and never came down again at all. Tamara gracefully launched herself, wafted halfway across the stage with her body held perfectly in position, and disappeared into the wings like a fragile puff of down.

The genuine applause of the audience was interrupted by a brutal cut to backstage. Tamara squatted beside a pile of ropes and dirty machinery, her hands on her bent knees, her rump in the air. Sweat streamed down her face

and stained the underarms of her bodice, and her chest heaved as she gasped painfully, noisily, for breath. At first she was not aware of the camera. When she did see it, she straightened up with a puppetlike jerk, and the look of shocked helplessness and embarrassment on her face was truly pitiful to behold. Tycho wanted to close his eyes.

"She's not expecting this," came an unpleasant, delighted voice from the front row. "But I wanted the element of surprise. I thought it was important to get some real backstage color." Yes, and spoil the whole effect she worked so hard to create, thought Tycho angrily. What a nasty person this man was! It was difficult for Tycho to think of him as himself, though he knew he had to be.

The presence of the camera was forcing Tamara to submit, grudgingly, to an interview. "Easier?" she gasped, dabbing at her face with tissue. "Yes, well, I have done *Giselle* on the earth many times, and of course fighting gravity is one of your basic problems, and, uh . . ." She paused to pant uncomfortably. "Well, of course, if you were just trying for the same elevation, it *would* be easier on the moon, with only one-sixth gravity. But the whole point of coming up here to dance is to get these spectacular effects. It's just as hard to jump thirty feet on the moon as it is to jump five feet on the earth." She smiled slightly, struggling to make the most of the situation. "In a way, it's harder, because you're in the air so much longer, so you have to hold your position much—"

"Thank you, I think we're ready for our next number now," interrupted the interviewer. "Backstage on the moon, we have just been speaking with Tam—"

"Now this next one isn't so old-fashioned. I think it's

really going to be spectacular," announced Mr. Tithonus, effectively blotting out the dancer's name.

There was a dissonant electronic shriek, and a woman dressed in a piece of red string burst onto the stage. She jumped into the air, spinning like a top, and turned an uncountable number of times before she landed. Three men in blue string appeared, formed a triangle, and began playing catch with the woman. As they tossed her back and forth between them, she assumed different positions in the air: first straight like an arrow, then waving her arms, then grabbing her feet with her hands, then arching her back and putting her feet on her shoulders, and finally wrapping her ankles around her neck. She remained in that position as the men gathered together and heaved her up and out into the wings. Then they began jumping frantically, hardly seeming to touch the ground as they spun over and around each other through the air, like three dolls in the hands of an invisible juggler. At the same moment, they all landed together on their hands and danced around in that position for a while, forming patterns with their legs and feet. Then they did perfect handsprings that sent them soaring up to disappear in the space above the top of the stage.

As soon as they were gone, three green shapes came bouncing chaotically across the screen. They were limbless, not like people at all. Apparently they were dancers encased in bags that could be stretched and twisted into amoebalike forms. In a moment they careened out of sight.

The lights went on and Mr. Tithonus was up on the platform again, basking in the applause, which died very quickly. They were applauding the dancers, not him, but

he waited until the last stray clap had faded before opening his mouth. "Thank you, thank you," he said. "I told you it would be spectacular, didn't I? But don't go, the dancing isn't over yet," he pleaded, as several people got up and started to leave. "There's more to come." Reluctantly, the people went back to their seats. "Just a brief commercial message here while the dancers get ready for their next number. Now, all you wonderful people have some questions, and I bet I can guess what they are. First question: How does a company become a sponsor for this great entertainment experience? That one's easy. All you have to do is—"

Tycho had had enough. He got up and headed for the door. There wasn't one, but there was a red exit sign glowing at eye level on the back wall. "Hey, wait a minute," he heard his older self say. "Don't go away, young—" But as Tycho approached the letters, the wall opened, and he ran out into the reception room.

The silver woman looked up in surprise as he sped past. "What's the matter, didn't you like it?" she demanded.

"It made me sick!" Tycho shot back at her, stopping in front of the green tube.

"Well, there's just no explaining people's taste," she said. "Of course, being weightless always does make me a trifle queasy, but I can't see how just watching other people—"

The capsule enclosed him and cut her off in mid-sentence.

# 10

Back behind the oak tree, he jumped for home and arrived one minute after he had left. He got upstairs without incident and crawled exhausted into bed. He dreamed vividly of people flying through the air, controlled by a horrible bleating voice that would not shut up.

He brooded at school the next day, unable to concentrate on anything but the future he had seen. Several teachers chided him for not paying attention. When he got home, he went up to his room and closed the door, hoping to avoid everyone in his family.

How naive he had been, to think that a glimpse at the future would be an innocuous little game. Perhaps it would have been, if his future were different. As it was, the trip ahead in time had left him more depressed than anything that had ever happened to him before.

How had he turned out that way? Foolishly dressed, physically unattractive, blatantly and pitifully craving the attention and approval which the audience, seeing through him, did not want to give. Worst of all, he had been so childishly nasty to his own sister, delighting in her embarrassment, even preventing the audience from hearing her name. Certainly Lunar Entertainments would be a fascinating career. But the fact that he was so obnoxious ruined all his pleasure in it. That he should turn out like that was unthinkable, impossible, and yet at the same time hideously unavoidable. It was locked into the future. No matter what he did, that was how it was going to be. He felt like giving up right now. Just drifting off and forgetting everything.

There was a knock on the door. Usually, no one knocked. Even when they did, they would come barging in right away anyway, without waiting for a response. This time there was only a knock. Unprepared for such politeness, Tycho said nothing, his eyes closed, until the knock came again, hesitantly, and he said, "Come in."

It was Leonardo.

"Oh, hi, Leo," Tycho said, looking up at him desultorily from the bed. What was his brother up to now?

Leonardo twisted his pudgy hands together nervously. He didn't seem to know where to look. "Well, Tycho, I just thought I should tell you . . . I don't know why I'm

doing this. But Ludwig . . . well, he keeps saying these funny things about you, making hints. He swears he's going to catch you, sooner or later."

"Catch me?" Tycho sat up quickly, the threat knocking all the grogginess out of him. "What's that supposed to mean?" He rubbed his eyes. "Come on in, Leo. And close the door."

Leonardo pushed the door shut and approached the bed. "I'm not sure what he means. He's vague about it, like it's a secret that he doesn't want to share until he knows more. But he still wants to make everybody else suspicious—including Bobby and Judy."

Tycho began to think hard. What had he given away? What precautions had he forgotten to take? At all costs the egg must be guarded and protected. If anyone else knew about it, he was lost. "I don't know what you mean, Leo," he said calmly. "Give me an example, something specific. Then maybe I'll know what he's driving at."

Leonardo pulled out the desk chair and sank down heavily. Plump was really an understatement for him; he was on the verge of being obese. When had he put on all that extra weight? It was odd that Tycho hadn't noticed it until now.

"Well, he said . . ." Leonardo began. Then he looked back uncomfortably at the door.

What was wrong with him? Tycho had never known him to be so timid. Leonardo's obsequious manner, combined with Tycho's own nervous curiosity, made Tycho irritable. "Are you deaf or something, Leo? I bet they can hear him banging out that stupid étude on the next block. Listen, he's going to make that same mistake again." They

waited. "See? I knew he would. Come on, Leo, he can't break in on us. And if anybody else does, *I'll* protect you," he added sarcastically.

"Well, after school, we were having a snack in the kitchen. Apples and candy bars. He told me and Tamara and Judy that he heard you sneak up and down the stairs late last night. First you disappeared all day Saturday, and then you locked yourself in the bathroom Saturday night, and now you're sneaking around the house early in the morning and late at night, when everyone else is in bed. You never did that before."

"I was hungry. I went down to get a snack. *You* of all people should understand that."

"Well, you don't have to get mad and start insulting me," said Leonardo petulantly, putting his hand to his chest. "I'm just trying to help you."

"I'm not mad, Leo. But is that all Ludwig said? Come on, get it out. We don't have much time."

"No. He said you had something, something special, like a secret tool or an experiment that you would only do when nobody else was around; and it wasn't safe, you might set the house on fire or something. And Judy said, 'Why don't you just ask him about it?' And he said he did, but you lied about it. And he said he was going to catch you and get it away from you before you did something dangerous and somebody got hurt."

"What did Judy say then?"

"She told him to stop worrying about you and go and practice. And he said he would prove he was right."

For a moment they just watched each other, while muffled waves of the Revolutionary Étude rolled and trem-

bled from downstairs. Then Tycho said, "Why are you telling me this? Why not just go along with him?"

"Well . . ." Leonardo looked away, flipping papers on the desk. "I don't know if he's right or not, but I thought maybe, if he was right, and you did have a secret game or something, and I helped you out and warned you, then maybe . . . you would share it with me."

So that was it! Naturally Leonardo wasn't doing this just to help him out. He was doing it for a reward, and to be one up on Ludwig. But perhaps Ludwig's suspicions were not all bad, after all. Perhaps he could even use them to his own advantage. "Well, Leo," Tycho said slowly. "Thanks for telling me. It really helps a lot. But I'm afraid Ludwig's a little bit mixed up."

"You mean there isn't anything?" Leonardo said with real disappointment. Then he went on, earnestly, "Please tell me the truth, Tycho. You can trust me, I promise."

"I didn't say there wasn't anything, I just said Ludwig is a little mixed up." Tycho stood up and paced briefly, his hands in his pockets, prolonging the suspense. It also gave him a chance to touch the egg, just to be sure it was safe. Abruptly he turned and faced Leonardo. "Because yes, there is something. But it's not a game. It's not an object or a thing." It was very important to get that untruth across. "It's more like . . . a *power*."

"Oh, come on, Tycho," Leonardo said crossly. "You don't expect me to believe *that*, do you? I'm only going to help you if you tell me the truth."

"But it *is* the truth," Tycho said fervently. "And I can prove it. It takes a lot of practice, but with this power I can tell the future."

"Cut it out, Tycho," said Leonardo, sounding really disgusted now.

"But it's true," Tycho insisted. "Listen, Leo. If I told you what was going to happen at supper tonight, and what people were going to say, and it was right, would you believe me then?"

"Sure I would." Leonardo shrugged skeptically. "*If* it was right, and *if* it was detailed enough. Not just some fortune-teller's trick."

"And if it is, will you help me out, and be on my side, and keep tabs on Ludwig for me?"

"I guess so. If you'll teach *me* how to do it too."

"It's a deal," Tycho said. Then he became aware that the music had stopped. It couldn't have been better timed. "You better get out of here in case Ludwig comes up. I'll be up to your room in a little while and tell you what's going to happen tonight. And then we'll see what we shall see."

Leonardo left quickly, and Tycho sat down at the desk and opened a book. He waited until he heard Ludwig come upstairs, pause by his door, and then go into his own room. Quickly he adjusted the dials and jumped ahead two hours. He went and stood at the top of the stairs and listened for ten minutes, then went back to his room and returned thirty seconds after he had left. Half an hour later, he went up to Leonardo's room on the third floor.

Leonardo was working on the cafeteria section of his junior high school mural. A long line of students in brightly colored outfits snaked along the wall, ending at a counter where fat grinning ladies stood behind vats of spaghetti sauce and fried chicken. His tongue between his

teeth, Leonardo was just putting the finishing touches on a gleaming case of luscious chocolate pies.

"Okay," Tycho said, his voice bland and matter-of-fact, "Tonight we are going to have leftover stew disguised as meat pie, and chocolate soufflé for dessert."

"That doesn't prove anything," said Leonardo. "You could always just ask—"

"Wait a minute," Tycho said, holding up his hand, completely in control. "Let me finish. Bobby will complain that the pie is too salty and the crust is soggy. Then the soufflé won't rise; it will just be a gooey mess, and we'll have to drown it in whipped cream. But it will taste good anyway. Judy will say we're lucky she cooked anything at all, because she had so many patients today. Then Bobby will tell about one of his patients who's a kleptomaniac and can't stop shoplifting. Yesterday she stole a fifteen-pound turkey from the supermarket. The patient wrote Bobby a check for a hundred dollars which Bobby will return only if the patient doesn't steal anything for a month. Then Tamara will brag about how she did thirty-two perfect *fouettés* to the left, on point, and the whole class applauded; and Ludwig will say, 'Too bad you didn't get a videotape, since you'll never do it again'; and Judy will say, 'What's the matter with you, Ludwig? You've been out of sorts all day.' And Ludwig will say that nothing is the matter, that *I'm* the one who's been acting strange recently." Tycho paused. "And then, Leo, *you* will stick up for me."

Leonardo stared at Tycho for a moment. Then he pursed his lips and lifted his eyebrows. "All right, Tycho," he said. "We'll see."

"We sure will," Tycho said.

It was wonderful to watch Leonardo's face at the table that evening. His theatrical expression of disdain at the beginning of the meal gave way to absolute, openmouthed shock when the little scene began to play itself out. At first he couldn't keep his eyes from Tycho's. Then, as the scene went on in perfect detail, his face grew pale and he kept looking down at his plate, embarrassed and afraid. He was so upset that he didn't finish his soufflé. After Ludwig made his accusation, Leonardo said, with trembling sincerity, "I think you're imagining things, Ludwig. Tycho's just the same as he always was. I think you're the one with something to hide."

The feeling of power that rose within Tycho as he watched it all unfold was intoxicating. All he had to do was flip a few little dials, and his family would behave just as he wished. There was nothing he wouldn't be able to do now, no problem he couldn't solve.

When Leonardo approached him later, his manner was fawning and abject. "Tycho, that was amazing, that was incredible," he said, slowly shaking his head. "I can still hardly believe it. But I *have* to believe it. Can you really show me how to do it too?"

"Sure," Tycho said casually. "But first you have to prove you really are on my side. Keep tabs on Ludwig, tell me everything he says about me. And keep throwing in those remarks about how he's imagining things. Then we'll see how much I can teach you."

But the heady sensation of total command lasted only until he undressed for bed and took a good look at the egg. He dropped it as though it were red-hot, the elation vanishing like a popped balloon. The egg had metamorphosed again.

There was an ominous feeling in the pit of his stomach as he examined it. The green end was more jewellike than before, with a richer, warmer glow. It had a mysterious underwater quality now, that was quite hypnotic. He felt that if he stared into it long enough, he could see dim shapes moving deep within the jewel, far, far away. And around the middle there were two glittering filaments: one silver and the other red.

Clearly there were powers at work here, over which he had no control at all. He was not in command. The bleakness of the future he had glimpsed the night before came flooding back in a rush.

But maybe it wasn't hopeless. After all, he hadn't seen very much of the future. It was very likely that he had stumbled upon himself during an off moment. Perhaps if he went back, and got a fuller picture, it wouldn't be so bad after all.

Still, something urged him to stay away from the future. But once the idea of going back and checking it out more thoroughly occurred to him, he could not get rid of it. And what harm could he do? He had already been there. And this was basically a *positive* mission: to look for the good things. It was only fair. He owed it to himself.

He had been there from 11 A.M. to 2 P.M. All he had to do was arrive at 2:30 on the same day to avoid running into himself. And he didn't even have to make Ludwig more suspicious by sneaking outside again. He knew that his room would be unoccupied and basically unchanged. He could make the jump without even getting out of bed.

He put on the same traveling clothes. He carefully set the dials. He lay down in bed, pressed down on the jewel,

and felt faint. Then he jumped into the future, 19 years, 364 days, and 15½ hours, exactly.

And landed painfully on the floor.

"Huh?" he said aloud, opening his eyes. And then, with a terrified cry, he was on his feet, peering around frantically in all directions. It wasn't only that the bed had been moved. The room, and the hallway beyond, were utterly different.

# 11

He closed his eyes and shook his head and looked again. The room remained different. It felt unreal, like being in the kind of dream in which everything around you changes without reason, and you never really know where you are. Except that he wasn't dreaming.

Maybe he had made a mistake and arrived twenty years later than he thought. He checked and double-checked the dials. There was no mistake. It was exactly the same day as his last trip, only three and a half hours later. The strange-looking calendar clock on the wall confirmed it.

It made no sense at all. His mind did not want to accept it. But he couldn't pretend it hadn't happened; he *had* to accept it. In a few hours, the familiar room he had seen the last time he was here had been drastically altered.

The only furniture was a sleek and shining green plastic desk. Part of the desk top curved up to form itself into a printed keyboard like the one he had seen on Judy's desk last time, but this one had a screen attached to it, like a computer terminal. Piles of printed forms were arranged neatly around the keyboard. One pile was all horse-racing forms and information about different horse races all over the world. Another pile was all dog races. There were piles of information about different sports: boxing and baseball and football. The largest pile was concerned with the stock market and various corporations. Tycho had never known anything about horse racing, nor had he ever been much of a sports fan. Business meant nothing to him. Perhaps this was someone else's room now. There was a stack of envelopes arranged in a transparent cube. He pulled one out. His own name and this address were printed on the back. Oddly, there was no mention of Lunar Entertainments. Still, this was his desk all right. Somehow, he had become a business and sports enthusiast.

He stepped cautiously out into the upstairs hall, trying to prepare his mind to accept other impossible alterations. For he had already seen that the hallway had changed in a way that could not have been done in a half hour, or four hours, or even a day. The wooden wainscoting and old flowered wallpaper were gone. The walls were now covered with a starkly gleaming greenish material that

took the daylight and reflected it back in strange subtle patterns that seemed to be moving deep within the walls. It was beautiful, but also frightening, and he didn't want to look at it very long.

He started across toward what had been Judy and Bobby's study, and then froze. There was an intense, high-pitched bleeping downstairs, and then quick heavy footsteps. Someone was home. Tycho moved carefully toward the top of the stairs.

"What is it?" said a man's voice.

"Is this Mr. Tycho Tithonus?" said a bland mechanical tone that was neither male nor female.

"Yes, it is,"

How could it be? Tycho had left his older self only a short time ago, in the middle of his presentation at Lunar Entertainments. But his mind was quickly becoming adept at accepting the unacceptable. It was pointless to keep pinching himself and wondering if he was going crazy. If he paid attention to what was going on, and did a little careful exploring, then he might be able to come up with an explanation for all these discrepancies. He took a few quiet steps down the stairs. Perhaps from the landing he would be able to see himself.

"We have a collect call for you from Satellite 619-AKP, a Mr. Leonardo Tithonus. Will you accept the charges?"

"Well . . ." Tycho said irritably. "Oh, well, I guess I might as well. Put him on. Oh! Operator, wait a minute."

"Yes, sir."

Tycho reached the landing. It hardly surprised him now that the furnishings downstairs were completely different. It was like the kitchen had been on his last visit. Bulbous

shapes grew out of the floor and walls in velvety textured fabrics, mostly in various shades of green. But the furniture didn't look new. It was shabby and rather threadbare in places. The room had a generally disorganized and sloppy look about it, as though it was rarely dusted or vacuumed or picked up.

He could see his older self from behind, wearing a kind of jump suit that had a large pouch or pocket attached to it. He had his hand in the pocket. He was facing the five-foot-square wall screen that Tycho had seen the last time. From the landing, Tycho had a good view of the screen. Pink bands of light vibrated across it from left to right.

"Operator, I'm switching on the privacy code. Last time I went private on satellite frequency, there was a lot of noise. Will you see that it doesn't happen this time."

The bands of light had slowly turned blue. "Privacy code on satellite frequency is occasionally subject to interference by broadcasts from the moon or commands to robot modules in space. I'm sorry, sir, it is beyond our control. If it should happen, simply disconnect and place another—"

"All right, all right, I know how to do that. I was just trying to get some decent service. For the amount I pay, I deserve that much."

The bands of light were purple now. "If you have a question about your bill, please punch—"

"No, no, I don't have a question about my bill! Just go away and put the call through. I haven't got all day."

Why was he so irritable? And why did he have to be so nasty to the operator, who was only doing her job? Although the operator was probably not a person at all, but

a machine. In that case his rudeness was not objectionable, only rather pitiable.

There was a burst of static. Red lightning sizzled briefly across the screen, and then it went white. A brightly lit room came into focus, with walls that curved smoothly into the ceiling and floor to form a perfectly spherical interior. There were no windows, only a cushiony white padding that covered everything. Something that looked like a large, pink ball floated in the center of the room. Tycho crept carefully down two more steps to get a better view. Then he saw what it was that floated there, and felt sick.

It was Leonardo. An inhumanly fat Leonardo, his barely recognizable features swallowed up by the huge mounds of his cheeks. On Earth, his enormous jellylike bulk would have been dragged down by gravity, creating deep folds of flesh and giving him a pear-shaped look. Weightless, in orbit, the fat floated freely around his limbs and torso. Were it not for the occasional gentle undulations that rippled across the vast expanse of his body, he would have looked like a plastic swim toy that had been pumped up with far too much air. Tycho had the uncomfortable feeling that at any second he might pop.

"Took you long enough to answer," Leonardo said petulantly.

"I'm a busy man, you know that, Leo," Tycho said. "Come on, spit it out. What do you want this time?"

"I want to come home!" blurted Leonardo. His lower lip quivered, and waves rolled up and down the many layers of chin fanning out below his face.

"Oh, no, not *that* again!" moaned Tycho, his shoulders

slumping wearily. "If I'd known you were just going to start that garbage all over again, I wouldn't have accepted the call. In fact, I think I'll just dis—"

"No no no!" shrieked Leonardo. "Please, Tycho, *please* don't hang up. I promise, that isn't all I wanted to say. Please don't hang up; nobody ever calls me. And I . . ." He was panting heavily. "I thought of some important things I wanted to say."

"Like what?"

"Well, uh . . . I spoke to Ludwig today, just a little while ago."

"Ludwig! But I thought you said nobody ever called you," Tycho said quickly.

"Well, hardly anybody ever does. It's so expensive, you know that."

"I sure do." Tycho laughed. On the steps, his younger self felt like holding his ears, the sound was so unpleasant. "That's why I can't believe you spoke to Ludwig. Even if he could get that much money together, he wouldn't waste it calling *you*."

A small purple sphere floated past Leonardo's face. He reached out and popped it into his mouth. His little eyes, buried in flesh, swerved away from the screen. "We didn't talk about how Ludwig paid for the call," he said slowly. "We talked about you."

Tycho tried another laugh, unsuccessfully. His voice had grown rather shrill. "What are you *claiming* you told him?"

"Don't panic, Tycho. I didn't give away any of your slimy little business secrets . . . yet. But I could, anytime I wanted. Ludwig's going to call back. He's very suspi-

cious. Don't think you're safe just because I'm up here, Tycho. You're more vulnerable now than ever. Bring me back down to Earth, and I won't talk. But if you leave me up here, I'll spill it all. Even those crazy secret plans you have, and that thing you want to build. I swear I will!" He clenched his teeth. Concentric ripples flowed across his cheeks, like waves from a pebble tossed into a pond.

"Why, you stupid blob! I think you're actually trying to blackmail me."

The scene was painful to watch. But it was also compelling, and Tycho could not bring himself to turn away from it. He crept down another step.

His future self seemed to be at a loss for words, taking deep breaths and tapping his foot nervously as he stared at the screen. Then abruptly he said, "Ludwig must have told you about Tamara. He wouldn't have called without telling you. The three of you have always been so . . . *close*." He said the word with contempt.

Bright panic flashed in Leonardo's eyes. His chins trembled. With an attempt at casualness, he spun almost gracefully in the air, his flesh curling around him in slow motion, to grab at another purple ball. He turned back to the screen, his body continuing to billow languidly as he spoke. "Tamara? What's to tell? She's still the same, of course." His voice was not convincing. "Still teaching. Still mourning the dancing career she never had."

*The dancing career she never had.* On the bottom step, Tycho almost stumbled and fell as the impossibility of that statement punched him in the stomach. It was difficult enough to accept the instant cosmetic changes in the house. But he had seen Tamara dance beautifully. She

had done *Giselle* many times, according to her interview. Now was he expected to believe that all that had never happened? It was too much. The unreality of what he was hearing caused the room to swim dangerously around him.

His older self was laughing again. "Wrong, Leonardo. Your little game is over. She quit just last week. Ludwig would have told you."

"She quit teaching! But what happened? How is she?" In his genuine concern for her, Leonardo seemed to have forgotten that he was giving himself away. "But she always clung to her teaching. She never got a chance to dance, but at least she had *that*. How is she going to survive?"

"She went to live with Bobby and Judy, to take care of them," Tycho said blandly. "She didn't want them going to a nursing home. I'll see that she doesn't starve."

"You made her do it, Tycho! You did it to her!" Leonardo shrieked, suddenly out of control. His face grew pink and wet and swelled enormously. His flailing limbs whipped up a maelstrom across his torso. "You didn't want to waste money on them! It was cheaper to get Tamara to nurse them! You took her away from the only thing she had left!"

"Cut it out, Leonardo!" Tycho bellowed.

Leonardo's mouth slammed shut. He floated, fearful and undulating.

"I'm bored with your stupid little games!" Tycho went on, his voice stinging like a whip. "I know Ludwig can't get through to you. I know nobody but me will accept your collect calls. You're isolated like you never would be on Earth, and that's the way it has to be. And it's your

own fault. You thought you were smart, figuring out how I operate. It was the dumbest thing you ever did. I'm not going to let you ruin me, expose me. You're lucky you're still alive."

Leonardo was babbling now. "Please, please, let me come back. You don't know what it's like out here. I promise I won't tell. I'll never tell."

"But Leo, you're so much more comfortable up there than you'd ever be down here." Tycho's voice had taken on a humorous, cajoling quality. "The whole medical profession assures me of that. It was no picnic dragging around those 659 pounds in Earth gravity, now was it, Leo? Out there you float effortlessly, like a bubble. You'll live a lot longer out there, Leo. Research has demonstrated that. And it's not cheap, either. I'm doing you a tremendous favor."

"But it's so lonely and boring and awful. It's driving me nuts, Tycho. I don't care if I—"

"But you can eat and eat, and not worry about it, Leo. And you can watch your video screen. And you can do your little drawings. It must be idyllic."

"*Please*, Tycho. You don't know what it's like. There's nothing to draw. It's so endless and awful. Please. I promise I won't . . ." Then Leonardo peered closer. He shook his head, and large round droplets of sweat bobbed gently away from him. He swam closer to the screen. His face went crafty again. "But Tycho," he murmured. "You didn't tell me you had a visitor."

Both Tychos stiffened. "What are you talking about?" demanded the older one. The younger one froze, too terrified to move a muscle.

Leonardo was grinning now. "I swear, you must be slipping at last, Tycho. So careless. On the stairway behind you. I think I detect a familiar little face."

The older Tycho spun around, his hand twitching inside his pocket. For a moment Tycho stared into his grown-up face, hard and cold and afraid, with hooded, red-rimmed eyes and deep lines already etched into the forehead. It was definitely his own face. But it was not the same face he had seen at Lunar Entertainments.

Then the face started toward him, shouting something. But Tycho wasn't listening. He was leaping up the stairs, two at a time, adjusting the dials as he went. *Don't panic. Think about what you're doing. Calculate.* He pounded across the upstairs hall. In his room, his hands shook as he checked the dials, trying to ignore the footsteps on the stairs, the footsteps in the hallway.

His older self burst into the room. The face was maddened by rage, inhuman, the eyes bursting out of their sockets, the mouth a shapeless hole. He was waving something in his hand, but before Tycho had a chance to get a good look at it, he pressed down on the jeweled end and felt faint.

And returned to his familiar bedroom. His heart racing, he checked the bedside clock. It was thirty seconds after he had left. He was lucky. He had managed to get the calculations right, even in that emergency. Next time, though—if there ever was a next time—it would be a good idea to set the dials for his return as soon as he got there. Just in case he might have to make another quick exit.

But he didn't think there would be a next time. This trip had made him more depressed than ever. His inten-

tion had been to look for positive things, but everything he had seen was far worse than before. He wasn't merely a callous fool. He had become a criminal and a monster. How easy it would be to go into the future and find out the results of a race or a stock market transaction. Then return to the present and place his money accordingly, to assure his own profit. What a terrible selfish abuse of this wonderful tool!

But far more terrible was what he had done to Leonardo, just to protect himself. How had he turned out that way?

He did not sleep at all that night. His trips to the future twisted back and forth in his head through the long hours, hopelessly bewildering. He knew that both visits had been to the same day. Calendars on both trips had told him that. How was it possible, then, that there had been so many impossible differences?

The question plagued him all night. It plagued him all day in school, when he wasn't falling asleep in class. It plagued him after school, compelling him to scribble lists of what he had seen both times. He went over the lists again and again. He studied them compulsively. It was the only way he could think of to try to find a plausible explanation.

Still, he should have known better than to put anything down in writing.

# 12

It was at supper that the explanation began to come.

He ate mechanically. He looked up when people spoke to him and responded appropriately. But all the time he was going over the lists in his head.

"You seem depressed, Tycho, my baby," Judy said.

"Oh, no, I'm fine. Just a little tired. I had trouble sleeping last night."

"You never had any trouble sleeping before," said Ludwig. He shook his head in a puzzled way and ran his hand through his flaming red crew cut. "Maybe you're not just

lying there trying to sleep. Maybe you're sneaking around, doing things you're not supposed to do."

"Ludwig, leave baby alone!" Judy said sharply. She always defended Tycho, her favorite child.

Tycho glanced at Leonardo. Leo was ready. "I think Ludwig's just mad because Tycho's getting too big for him to pick on," said Leonardo in his most analytical voice. "I know how it feels. I was mad when he got taller than me, too."

"Who asked for your opinion?" Ludwig said furiously. "Just keep your fat face shut, creep!"

"Ludwig! Apologize at once or leave the table," Bobby said.

"I'll leave," said Ludwig, his eyes on Tycho as he pushed back his chair and stood up. He went noisily up the stairs and slammed the door of his room.

Tycho didn't know whether or not to be grateful to Leonardo. Leo had stuck up for him, but only because of the way Tycho had manipulated him, using the egg to trick him. He thought of the poor grotesque creature that Leonardo was going to become, and his own inhuman treatment of him. Was the little arrangement they had made yesterday perhaps the seed of that terrible future?

"How was class today, Tamara?" Bobby asked, in an attempt to lighten the atmosphere.

"Uh . . . fine," Tamara said softly, looking down at her plate.

"Did anything interesting or unusual happen?"

"Uh . . . well, Madame did say some things about a dancer's career."

"Yes? Go on," Bobby coaxed her fondly. Tamara was so

shy that she hardly ever said more than a few words at a time, even in front of her own family. She never talked about herself.

"Well," said Tamara, playing with her food and blushing slightly. "She said it's more than just being good. You have to be good, of course, but you also have to be lucky. You have to be at the right place at the right time . . . uh, because of the importance of chance. . . ."

It was rare to hear Tamara say so much. Tycho stopped mulling over his own thoughts and began to listen.

"Chance? That's interesting. Go on, dear," Judy prodded her.

"Well . . . Then Madame talked about Tamara Karsavina. Everybody looked at me." She glanced up for a moment with a slight smile, blushing more deeply. "She said she was a great dancer, but chance was what made her really famous. Pavlova was Diaghilev's leading ballerina in Paris. But then Pavlova walked out, and Karsavina was there, so he took her and she became an international star. But if Pavlova hadn't quit like that, or Karsavina hadn't joined the company when she did . . . then who knows what would have happened?" She shrugged. "Chance, Madame says. You can't forget about chance. Everybody got kind of bored, though."

"That's very interesting, dear. What about you, Leonardo? Anything new today?"

"Skin tones," Leonardo said. "I think I'm finally beginning to learn how to . . ."

Tycho stopped listening. Perhaps what Tamara had just said was the beginning of an explanation. Chance! He had never thought about it very much before. Now, one idea

after another came flooding in. What if someone happened to leave a book on a library table, and you stumbled across it, and found out about a whole field of interest you had never heard of before. It could make a tremendous difference in your career. Or what if you stayed five minutes later at a party, and someone new came in, and you hit it off right away? You might end up spending the rest of your life with that person. But if you didn't find the book, or didn't stay late at the party, then the rest of your life might be completely different.

Your life might be made up of little unimportant events, fluttering by like pollen in the wind that could just as easily land in one place as in another. Or it might be a series of paths that branched off at frequent intervals, like the limbs of a tree. At each fork you might happen to go one way or the other. A very small decision at the beginning could lead you to a very different place at the end.

"Ludwig's awfully quiet up there," Judy said. "After supper he always listens to records or practices his solfeggio. But I don't hear a thing."

"He's probably just sulking," suggested Leonardo. "He's been strange lately. Anyway, what I was saying was, the kind of tone you use depends on the quality of the light. . . ."

The future, after all, was not already determined, like the past. It was still liquid and flowing, becoming solid only as each instant happened. Of course, character and personality had something to do with how things turned out. But so did chance, the unpredictable element. Because of chance, there were endless possibilities. *Which*

*meant that each person had many different possible futures.*

"Oh!" Tycho cried out, and stood up so abruptly that he knocked over his chair.

"Tycho! What's the matter, baby? You look like you've been stung by a wasp!" said Judy.

"Oh, sorry," said Tycho, picking up his chair. "I just had an important idea. I have to write it down. May I be excused?"

"Well, if it's that important, how can we stop you?" said Bobby. "Go ahead, Tycho."

It was more than important. He was too excited to sit still. At first, the discrepancies he had seen on his two trips to the future had been bewildering and frightening. Now they were marvelous, they were his salvation. They had demonstrated that he had more than one future. He had stumbled unluckily upon two terrible ones. But now he knew that he was not trapped in them. Once again he had hope. There were many other futures for him, and some of them had to be good. All he had to do was find one he liked, and then figure out how to make it happen. The relief was euphoric.

Until he reached his room. Ludwig was sitting at his desk, poring over the lists he had made.

"Ludwig!" he said. "Get out of there!" Automatically, he stuck his hand in his pocket to check on the egg.

The egg was not there.

His stomach contracted with fear. Where was it? Had he left it on his desk? Had Ludwig found it? With panic ringing through him, he grabbed for the paper in Ludwig's hand.

But his pause to check on the egg had given Ludwig

time to jump out of the chair and whip the paper behind his back. "What's the matter, Tycho? Something I'm not supposed to see? Or am I just *imagining* this piece of paper?"

"Come on, Ludwig. Give it back!" said Tycho, reaching for it again.

But Ludwig, who was taller than Tycho, held it up out of his reach, fending him off with his other hand. "Too late, Tycho. I've already read it. Give up."

Tycho stepped back and slumped down on the bed. "You've already read it?"

"Uh-huh," said Ludwig, nodding smugly.

Where was the egg? What a fool he had been to leave it lying around. But maybe Ludwig hadn't found it. He must find it himself, and tuck it safely away before Ludwig saw it. Meanwhile, Ludwig had the paper, and he had to deal with that. He would have to lie his way out of it. He felt sweat on his forehead. "Oh," Tycho said, thinking fast. "You already read it. Oh, well, I guess it doesn't matter. They were just some notes I was making. Notes for a . . . for a story, for English."

"A story for English, Tycho? Is that so?" Ludwig enquired pleasantly.

"Yes, yes, that's what it is," Tycho said, eagerly nodding his head. But where was the egg? He usually put it under his pillow when he went to sleep. Maybe he had left it there. Still sitting on the bed, he began casually working his hand toward the pillow, which lay on top of the bedspread.

"Sorry, Tycho." Ludwig's voice went cold. "I'm afraid that little lie won't work." He held the paper up and read from it. " 'Second visit to April 23, 2001. Tamara a pitiful

failure. Never had dancing career. Quit teaching to take care of Bobby and Judy. They are invalids. Leonardo a grotesque pig. Weighs 659 pounds. A failure as an artist. Imprisoned in satellite.' " Ludwig brought the paper down again and looked steadily at Tycho. "Nasty little story, isn't it? I wonder what Bobby and Judy would think of it?"

"But why would you show it to them, Ludwig?" Tycho asked. His hand could not reach to the pillow. As casually as possible, he slid over on the bed and slipped his hand underneath, gesturing with his other hand to distract Ludwig. "What are you driving at? Can't you please just leave me alone?"

"Not until I find out what's really going on."

"But I told you, it's just notes," Tycho insisted. There was nothing under the pillow. What had happened to it? What if Ludwig had already found it? He felt frantic and hopeless. "It's just something I made up, Ludwig. It doesn't mean—"

"Cut it out, Tycho," Ludwig said harshly. "I'm not blind. I'm not deaf. You can't fool me, like the others. I saw you disappear on Saturday morning. I saw you show up out of nowhere in those bushes on Sunday morning. I hear you sneaking around at funny times. And now this!" He shook the paper at him. "A visit to the future. Descriptions of what you saw there. You found something the other day, I know you did. I don't know exactly what it is. I just know it's something fantastic. Something like . . . a time travel device, maybe."

"Don't be ridiculous, Ludwig," Tycho said haltingly. "That's impossible. I'm surprised at you."

"Then tell me what it is. Prove it's something else. Or I'm taking this paper downstairs and showing it to Bobby and Judy."

That was a scene Tycho didn't like to think about. They wouldn't believe that he had really visited the future, of course. But they would be incensed by what he had said about the family. The future was so important to them. It would be weeks before they forgave him for describing Leonardo and Tamara as failures. And Ludwig would continue to be suspicious.

"I want to be included, Tycho. You found something fantastic, and you're keeping it all to yourself. Count me in—right now—or I'm taking this paper downstairs."

Then Tycho saw the egg. It must have rolled off the desk, for it was lying on the floor about a foot from where Ludwig was standing. Panic chewed at his stomach. How could he get it without Ludwig noticing? Briefly, he considered telling Ludwig everything, to get him off his back. But of course it wouldn't get Ludwig off his back. He would just get the egg away from him.

And what on earth would Ludwig do with it? Even if he could trust him with it, the idea of sharing it with anyone was repugnant, sickening. He could not share it. Anything would be better than that, even the exposure of his list. The most important thing was to get Ludwig out of there, fast, before he saw the egg. Tycho's eyes wandered toward it, then back to Ludwig again.

"Well, Tycho," Ludwig said. "Tell me what you found. Show it to me. Or I'll take this downstairs. Your time is up."

"I didn't find anything, Ludwig," Tycho said, forcing

himself not to look at the egg. "What can I say? Go ahead and take that story downstairs if you want to. I can't stop you. Go on. Take it."

Ludwig peered at him curiously. "Why so eager, Tycho? Do you want to get rid of me?"

"No, no, I just . . ." He couldn't help it. His eyes darted toward the egg again.

Ludwig was watching him. He saw his eyes move. He followed them. "Hey!" he said, looking down. "What's that?" He bent over to pick it up.

But Tycho was nearer the ground, and faster. He squatted down and grabbed it and bounced back onto the bed, the egg squeezed in his fist. Then Ludwig was on top of him. They were both panting heavily, but aside from that their scuffle was curiously quiet. Ludwig had large, strong hands. He began prying Tycho's fingers open. Tycho struggled, but Ludwig's hands were stronger. The dials came into view. Ludwig had his hand on it now, he was pushing Tycho away.

All Tycho had to do was get control of the dials for a few seconds. Then he could get out of there and try to save himself from this awful mess. Grunting heavily, he kicked Ludwig in the shin with all his strength. He was wearing heavy boots. Ludwig cried out and bent over in pain. Quickly, quickly Tycho spun the dials, checked his watch, and without even worrying about Ludwig's reaction, traveled forty-five minutes into the past.

They were all downstairs, eating supper. Tycho groaned and collapsed onto the bed. The relief of having the egg again was a caressing, delicious sensation. But even though he knew that he had all the time in the world now,

a part of him was still frantic. He had to correct the situation, and he wanted to get it over with as soon as possible.

But how? Ludwig had seen the egg. Was it possible to undo that? Tycho brooded for several minutes, feeling hunted. Then an idea came to him. He wasn't sure what would happen if he tried it. There were a lot of risks involved. He himself would have to be a convincing actor. It would be the most flagrant manipulation of time he had yet attempted. But he had already realized that anything would be better than sharing the egg with Ludwig. And he could not come up with any better plan.

The egg was in his hand, but there was, of course, another one lying on the floor—the one Ludwig was going to find in forty-five minutes. He kicked that one across the floor into his open closet, then closed the closet door. Ludwig would never find it now. He picked up the list from the desk, ripped it carefully to pieces, and buried it in the wastebasket. He tore another piece of paper from the pad, thought for a moment, and then wrote a few sentences on it. He took a couple of minutes just to breathe deeply and relax and prepare himself. Then, more carefully than ever, he set the dials. Still holding the egg, he put it in his pocket, pressed down on the green end, and returned exactly one second after he had left.

Ludwig was still in the act of backing away from the bed. When he looked at Tycho, there was confusion in his eyes. "Tycho! You just . . . How . . . Why did you have to kick me so hard?"

Tycho felt rather confused himself, but he did have a story to cling to. "I couldn't help it, Ludwig," he gasped.

"I was just so shocked when you suddenly attacked me like that."

"But I wanted to get . . . You had that . . ." Ludwig frowned and shook his head.

"You wanted to get what, Ludwig?" Tycho asked. "I don't know what you're talking about. You just attacked me, for no reason."

"But you had something . . . or maybe you didn't . . ."

Tycho spread his empty hands. "I never had anything, Ludwig."

"No, you didn't, did you?" Ludwig mumbled dazedly. "Wonder why I'm so confused . . ." He shook his head again, as if to clear it. Then he saw the piece of paper, which had fluttered to the floor during their scuffle. "Oh, that's right," he said, scooping it up. "I was just going to take this downstairs. And I will, unless you tell me what you've been doing."

"Well, you *are* right about my visions," said Tycho. He shrugged. "I don't know what else I can tell you."

"Who said anything about visions?" said Ludwig, his old self again. "I'm showing this to Bobby and Judy."

"But Ludwig," Tycho said earnestly, "maybe you better read it again before you take it down."

Ludwig held the paper up. " 'Last night's vision,' " he began. For a moment he closed his eyes and put his hand to his forehead. He gave Tycho a sidelong glance. Then he went on. " 'Last night's vision: At supper, Ludwig accused me of sneaking around. When Leonardo defended me, Ludwig called him a creep, and Bobby told him to leave the table. Ludwig came upstairs and found a piece

of paper on my desk. When I came upstairs, he threatened to show the paper to Bobby and Judy.' " Ludwig's face lit up, and he took a step back. "That's exactly what happened, Tycho!" he said, his voice rising. "It *is* true, then. You found something that shows you what's going to happen!"

"I keep telling you, Ludwig. It's not a *thing*," Tycho said, trying to make his voice tremulous and frightened. "It's dreams. I've been having these dreams, or visions, and they . . . it seems like they really happen. Oh, if only you hadn't seen the rest of that paper, Ludwig. Please, just forget what it says. For your own good."

But he was already reading. " 'But before Ludwig goes downstairs, he grows confused. He thinks he saw things that never happened. He forgets things that did happen. It is not the first symptom, but it is the strongest one so far, of the incurable neurological disease that . . . that is slowly taking over his . . . his mind.' " Slowly, Ludwig lifted his eyes from the paper and looked at Tycho.

"Oh, Ludwig, if only you hadn't read that," Tycho said sadly.

"Disease?" Ludwig said, sounding baffled. Then suddenly he was angry. "You're just trying to fool me, aren't you? To threaten me, to scare me! Well it won't work. I'm showing them." He started for the door.

"But why, Ludwig?" Tycho said. "You're not making sense. What are you trying to prove?"

In the doorway, Ludwig turned back. "I'm trying to prove that . . ." He squeezed his eyes shut. Then he looked briefly at the paper again. "Before it happened, you wrote down here that I would come to your room,

and find this paper, and threaten to show it to them," he murmured. "You couldn't know I was going to do that, but you predicted it. Your prediction came true. And now you're telling me . . ." Then he grabbed Tycho's shoulder and squeezed it painfully. "What kind of disease? Tell me! What is it? What's it going to do to me?"

"Ouch, Ludwig. You're hurting me!" Tycho pulled away. "You didn't have to be so rough," he said, rubbing his shoulder.

*"Tell me!"*

Tycho rubbed his eyes, trying to bring forth some tears. "It's hard to tell you exactly," he said in a choked voice. "Some things are definite, others are fuzzy and vague. I just see you getting more and more confused, having hallucinations, forgetting things, getting mixed up. And then . . . I have this picture of you lying in bed, with your body all covered up and . . . not moving."

Ludwig's face was always pale, but now it had gone almost chalk white. "I wouldn't believe you. . . . I wouldn't believe you at all. Only . . . you *did* predict what was going to happen. I . . . Can't you tell me any more? Is there any way to prevent it?"

"Oh, Ludwig, I don't know any more," Tycho moaned. He had even managed to get some tears to well up out of his eyes. "I wish I could tell you more, I really do. You start out imagining things, and then it gets worse and worse. Maybe I'll find out more, when I have another dream. Maybe, if you take care of yourself, it won't get any worse."

"If I take care of myself," Ludwig said almost inaudibly. He looked numbly at the paper, then let it slip to the

floor. "You *did* predict, you really did. I have to believe it. . . . I did think there was something. Now I don't know what. I . . ." He turned and wandered out of the room.

With a deep sigh, Tycho sank down onto the bed.

That night he traveled to the future again.

# 13

Tycho couldn't help wondering about what had gone on in Ludwig's mind. After all, he *had* read Tycho's description of the future; he *had* seen the egg on the floor. Tycho remembered those events himself. But then Tycho had gone into the past and altered things so that those events would not occur. But what did that really mean? Had they happened or not? And how much did Ludwig remember? Had the events been completely wiped out, or did some memory of them still linger in his brain? He had experienced them. That is, if they had ever really happened.

The situation was paradoxical and confusing. And now that the emergency was over, what he had done made Tycho uncomfortable. He tried to assure himself that all that mattered was the end result: Ludwig was convinced that he was having hallucinations and would no longer be suspicious of Tycho. One of his major problems had been eliminated. In a way, he was relieved. It was just so unfortunate that Ludwig had to believe he was incurably ill. That thought made Tycho feel rather sick himself. But it was Ludwig's own fault, argued another part of him. If he had just left Tycho alone, it never would have happened.

Thinking about it all gave Tycho a strange, fuzzy headache. He wanted to get away and forget about the whole disorderly episode. And now, after his realization about chance, the future beckoned invitingly once again. Its pull, in fact, was irresistible. Something still gnawed at him about visiting the future, but he had little trouble pushing it away. It was essential that he keep going back until he found the best possible future—for the rest of his family as well as for himself. It wasn't selfish at all. If he didn't go, they might all end up trapped in one of those terrible times. He was the only one who could prevent it.

Now he knew better than to make the jump from his bedroom. The room would probably be completely different again, and he didn't want to risk ending up in the same space as some new piece of furniture. What would happen then? There was also the chance that he might arrive at the same future he had visited the last time. If so, he wanted to be well out of the way of his enraged older self.

When everyone was asleep, he went quietly downstairs

and out to his spot behind the oak tree. His last trip had been short, only about half an hour, so he would set the dials to arrive at 3:15. He took the egg out of his pocket—and was hardly surprised to see that it had changed again.

Deep inside the green jewel, the shapes were now distinct; not drifting, but appearing to move quite purposefully. With difficulty, he dragged his eyes away from them to examine the middle. What he had thought were filaments were actually bands of little glittering cells, protruding slightly from the surface. There were three of them now, silver, red and gold. When he examined them more closely, he saw that there was motion here too. Or perhaps it was just tiny lights flickering on and off, the way blinking lights on a neon sign create the impression of movement. Clearly the egg was becoming increasingly active. It chilled him. But he didn't wait to think about what the activity might mean. He was getting better and better at avoiding certain things.

He pressed down on the jewel, felt faint, and traveled 19 years, 363 days, 16 hours and 15 minutes into the future. He had closed his eyes in preparation for the sudden appearance of the sun. Impatiently he waited for them to adjust. This might be one of the good futures! The glare faded. He opened his eyes eagerly.

The tree was gone. The grass was gone. He was standing on pavement. One inch from his nose was a solid wall.

He backed away to get a better look. A new addition to the house filled what had once been the backyard. No attempt had been made to create a pleasing relationship between the old and new. The contrast in styles was jarring; bringing them together this way made each structure look uglier than it would on its own.

But when Tycho held up his hand to block out the old house, he found that he rather liked the new addition. It was made of some kind of gleaming green plastic and appeared to have been poured. If some thick viscous liquid, seething and boiling and bubbling, had suddenly gone solid, it might look like this. There were ripples and eddies across its surface, and unexpected indentations and protuberances. It made no geometrical sense at all. Tycho wondered briefly who had dreamed it up.

He couldn't see anyone watching him from the old part of the house. He set the dials on the egg for a quick return, then slipped it into his pocket and started walking around the new structure. Was it intended to be beautiful, or was its shape determined by some function? And what could that function possibly be? He was hoping to find a window or a door, but he made a complete inspection without discovering either. It was totally sealed off from the outside, connected to the original building where the kitchen door had once been. The only way to get inside was through the old house, which he would now have to enter by the front door.

No one seemed to have noticed him yet. Maybe the house was empty and he could get inside without any trouble. When he reached the side of the house, he turned back for another look. From this angle he could see the top of the addition. A complex arrangement of curving metal rods, like a silvery spiderweb, arched up toward the sky. As he watched, the rods undulated slightly, like delicate saplings moving in a breeze. Only there was no breeze.

He walked around the house and hurried up the front steps, to find that the old wooden front door with its large

window was gone. In its place was a solid opaque rectangle, painted the same muddy green as the rest of the house. He pushed at the metal handle, then pulled. The door didn't budge. He tried again, with all his strength. Nothing happened. The door was locked.

It wasn't fair! To find that enticing, magical new structure, and then be unable to find out what it was for, or even to get a glimpse inside, was unbearably frustrating. So far he had seen nothing ominous at all. This might well be one of the good futures. He couldn't allow himself to leave without finding out what was going on. Was he going to have to take the risk of climbing in one of the windows? He wasn't sure he even knew how to open them from the outside.

He pulled and pushed at the door again, grunting. It was useless. Without much hope, he bent down to examine the keyhole under the handle. But was it even a keyhole? It resembled no lock he had ever seen before. It was not shaped like a key, and did not seem to have any parts that could move. It was merely a round indentation in the door, faceted, like a miniature gelatin mold.

He peered closer. There was something familiar about it. Where had he seen that shape before?

His hand strayed to his pocket to grip the egg. Without really thinking about what he was doing, he pulled it out. Looking at it might make him feel better. He gazed down into the jewel.

That was it! The jewel was the same shape as the indentation in the door. He pressed it into the hole. There was a slight sensation of suction, or magnetic attraction, as the jewel slipped snugly into place. He touched the handle. The door slid silently and effortlessly into the wall.

So it was more than just a time travel device. It was a tool that could do other things as well. Apparently in this future he had discovered what some of them were. If only the house would be empty now! There was probably so much he could find out inside.

But the first thing he was aware of as he entered was footsteps on the second floor. Unfamiliar footsteps, halting and slow. If he was going to see much before he got caught, he would have to be very quiet and careful.

This living room had the same bulbous green furniture, sprouting like various fungi out of the floor and walls. But it looked years older now, faded and worn, and not very clean. Lint and dust were everywhere. There was the large video screen, the lamps like tentacles, looking chipped and scratched and rarely used. And the piano was gone. In its place was a large bacteria-shaped sculpture of some green, jellylike material, with little white cacti growing out of it. The piano had been more attractive. Had Ludwig gone away and taken it with him? He could hear sounds that were probably supposed to be music, coming perhaps from a radio.

Then there were more footsteps above, quicker than the others. They moved to the stairs and started down.

The sculpture was ugly, but it made a convenient hiding place. Tycho crouched behind it. It was transparent enough to see through, distorting the world like a green fun-house mirror. Tamara appeared on the staircase, gnarled and pulsating through the plastic. She still had her hair in a bun, but her body and grown thick and graceless. She wore heavy practical shoes and a shapeless housedress; and though the day was warm, she was hunched inside a heavy sweater. Preoccupied, she moved

through the rooms without a glance in Tycho's direction and disappeared into the kitchen. Tycho listened for a moment, then moved out from behind the sculpture and followed her. The sounds grew louder as he neared the kitchen. He stopped at the threshold and peered inside.

The futuristic kitchen he had seen on his first trip already looked worn out: the once gleaming fixtures dull and grimy. An unappetizing smell of old fish and rancid grease lingered there. Tycho wrinkled his nose. Judy's kitchen had never smelled like that. But what difference did the kitchen make? It was the new addition he was interested in. He moved sideways against the kitchen wall as far as the refrigerator.

Where the back door had been, there was now an arched green passageway, descending slightly. Pressed against the curving side of the refrigerator, Tycho watched Tamara enter the passage. From his protected vantage point, he could see only the first few feet. Immediately Tamara was lost from view. To see more, he would have to step out from behind his cover and risk exposure. But he had no choice. He had to find out what was inside that thing. If she noticed him, he could always escape. Slowly, slowly he moved out from behind the refrigerator.

And was so amazed by what he saw that he forgot to be careful at all. He just stood there and stared.

Sunlight poured through the walls of the domelike room, bathing everything in a green glow. Ludwig, gaunt and aging at thirty-six, with only a thin fringe of pale hair, sat in the center of the room. He was almost completely surrounded by an electronic keyboard growing out of the floor. It had far more keys than a piano, and because of

the way it curved around him, he could reach all of them easily. He played lethargically, a pained, stoic expression on his face. And no wonder. A slithering, shrieking noise pulled from the instrument, like fingernails on a blackboard accompanied by the hiss and plop of bubbling mud, with a piercing obbligato of dentist drills. A spiderweb of metal rods, like the ones on the roof outside, hung from the ceiling directly over his head. The rods shivered and twitched with the same gasping, gulping rhythm as the music. Was it a kind of broadcasting device?

Leonardo was ensconced in an alcove on the left. Though not quite as huge as the Leo Tycho had seen on the satellite, he was still obese. Pasty dewlaps hung from his face, and the flesh of his torso bulged over upon itself in quivering folds. He was working on a sculpture like the one in the living room, taking some slimy green stuff from a vat beside him and shaping it carefully with his pudgy hands. This sculpture was covered with veiny, wrinkled bumps and snoutlike protuberances. There was a finished one on a shelf behind him that looked like a spiky sea anemone with several gaping, thick-lipped mouths.

Tamara was just sitting down at a kind of counter on the other side of Ludwig. There was only one object on the counter. It was far more glittering and complex than the object in Tycho's pocket. Still, the jewel at one end of it was easily recognizable. Casually Tamara picked it up, and Tycho felt an uneasy pang. What was Tamara doing with it? And where was his older self? Why didn't *he* have it?

Leonardo looked up from his work for a moment. "Is Bobby feeling any better?" he asked.

"No," Tamara said quietly. "I gave him an even larger dose. The pain seemed a little less when I left him. He was reading. I don't think it's going to last much longer."

"The sooner the better," Leonardo said. "Judy was luckier. She gave up right away."

"What about *him*?" Ludwig said grimly, still playing.

"He's asleep," Tamara said, and looked at her watch.

Instantly, Ludwig lifted his hands from the keyboard.

"Be careful, Ludwig!" Tamara hissed. "He could wake up any second. You know we're all linked together now. If he jolts you, I'll get it too."

"I know that," Ludwig said. "But just listen. Isn't it worth it?"

The relief from the sound of the keyboard was indeed blissful. "I know, I know it's heavenly," Tamara said tensely. "But as soon as he notices . . ."

"And now, just listen to this," said Ludwig, his face lighting up as he turned a knob and pressed a couple of buttons.

"Ludwig, no! He'll hear you," pleaded Leonardo.

But Ludwig wasn't listening. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and plunged into the Revolutionary Étude. Though the electronic sounds were thin and whining in comparison to the rich resonance of a real piano, Ludwig's passionate playing did give the music some depth. It was frightening to watch the tension of Tamara's and Leonardo's faces. But as Ludwig continued to play, and nothing happened, they began visibly to relax.

In the middle of the piece, Ludwig faltered, played some wrong notes, and stopped. He went back a few bars and tried again, and then again, but could not get beyond

a certain point. He dropped his hands weakly to his sides and shook his head. "I've forgotten it," he said dully. "This fake instrument, playing all this garbage . . . it drives the real stuff out of my head."

"Well, you better start playing it again," said Leonardo, picking up another handful of green stuff. "It was great while it lasted, but every minute the risk gets—"

"No!" Ludwig said vehemently. "Who knows when I'll ever get another chance? Here's a piece I'll never forget." And he began playing something soft and wistful and slow, a *Gymnopedie* by Satie.

"Oh," Tamara murmured, and her face softened, the furrows almost vanishing. "Oh, remember that piece? Remember how it was when you used to play that?" She lifted her eyes and turned toward her two brothers.

"You used to dance around the house when I played it," said Ludwig, smiling at her, his hands moving gracefully over the keys.

Leonardo turned from his work with abrupt distaste and wiped off his hands on a cloth. "That was when we had a yard, instead of this ugly thing," he said. "With grass and trees. And the top floor was mine then, not *his*. I used to . . . paint things on the walls."

"I remember," Ludwig said, nodding. "You did a wonderful mural of a school cafeteria, I think. I can still picture the food."

"Food," Leonardo said. He chuckled ironically. "If only we'd known at the time. We never really appreciated enough. When I think of the kinds of things Judy used to make . . ."

Tycho heard the creak of a floorboard, far above, and

the sound of a door opening. Was it his older self waking up?

The others didn't seem to have heard it. "And remember what Bobby and Judy were like then?" Tamara said, her voice growing excited. "They were so full of ideas, and plans and hope. Whoever thought they would just give up like they did, when everything changed?"

"When *did* everything start to change, anyway?" said Leonardo, frowning. "It's so difficult to pinpoint it exactly."

"That's true," said Ludwig, still playing. "It was so gradual, it had happened before we really noticed anything. But you know, there was a time when even . . . *he* was different."

"That's right," Tamara said, folding her arms across her chest and nodding. "If I think really hard, I can see him as a child."

Now, distinctly, Tycho heard footsteps on the attic stairs. It must be his older self coming down. Maybe he should warn them. But how? If only they would listen!

But they were still lost in their reminiscences. "Didn't he have a telescope or something?" said Leonardo.

"Yes," said Ludwig. "But he was interested in other things too. He made a vegetable garden once. Remember how much we encouraged him and helped him with that?"

Tamara smiled. "Remember how we all loved him so?" she said warmly. "He was the youngest. We adored him and babied him. We wanted to help him with everything."

The footsteps were now on their way down to the first

floor. Tycho's stomach went cold. He wanted to run, but panic and indecision kept him frozen on the threshold. They had to be warned! But how could he do it without giving himself away?

"We sure did baby him," Leonardo was saying. "We used to argue about who got to play with him and take care of him and teach him things. I remember feeling so proud and happy every time he learned something new."

"And we used to get angry at Bobby and Judy whenever they disciplined him even slightly," said Ludwig. "We thought they should let him do anything."

Tycho had entered the kitchen from the dining room. There was another entrance from the front hall. The footsteps were there now. Quickly Tycho stepped back toward the dining room and crouched down behind the refrigerator again. He wasn't really hidden, but there was at least a chance he might not be noticed here.

The footsteps moved quietly across the kitchen. Tycho saw a man walk past the refrigerator. He didn't see Tycho, and Tycho couldn't tell whether it was his older self or not. For the man was wearing a mask. It was a green plastic mask that fit tightly over his face, with slits for the eyes, nose, and the mouth. The man had a bulging pack on his back, from which sprouted a thick cord attached to some kind of device in his hand. He entered the green passageway.

"That's right," Tamara was saying. "I remember how I used to love hugging him so much—"

Then she screamed. Ludwig and Leonardo were screaming too. Tycho felt like screaming himself as he listened to the tortured cries that ripped harshly out of their

throats. When at last they stopped, he could hear them gasping for breath. He didn't want to look; he couldn't bear it. But before he knew what he was doing, he was standing up and looking into the passageway again.

The man stood in the center of the room, his back to Tycho. Ludwig, Tamara and Leonardo, their faces shockingly white, were bent over in pain. "Oh, so hard . . . Tycho," Ludwig managed to croak, his hand clutching his gut. "You didn't have to . . . make it so hard."

"But oh, my brother," came the soapy, syrupy voice from behind the mask. "You make me so sad. And I try to be merciful. That was only a two. You must strengthen yourself to be able to withstand a force of ten if you continue to play that nasty, evil stuff I heard."

"But Tycho," Tamara pleaded brokenly. "It was only a little rest. Just a moment to . . . to relax. We're trying to do what you want, we really are. Don't we at least deserve a moment of peace?"

"Peace?" The voice was rich and condescending, as though he were talking to a child. "But the more you backtrack like that, the farther away the true peace we are searching will be. When you disobey me, we lose days, we lose weeks. Oh, how I wish you could understand! I have told you again and again."

Leonardo had mechanically dipped his hands into the vat and was sculpting again. "All right, Tycho, but . . . We're trying so hard. We're working as fast as we can."

"Ah, but it is still not fast enough." The voice took on an inspirational resonance. The mask tilted upward, and one hand gestured nobly. "We are trying to open up a new fabric in the earth, a new texture, a new doorway. . . ."

The others glanced at each other quickly, embarrassed.

". . . And it takes time, my brothers and sister, lots of time, and I am afraid there is not very much time left. What is the matter, Ludwig? Must you force me to give you a taste of number six?"

Ludwig placed his hands on the keyboard. The wrenching, sickening sounds began again. The rods hanging from the ceiling quivered.

His back still to Tycho, the man in the mask bent over Tamara. "I have tried to protect you, my dear. I try so hard. But now, I am afraid that you no longer deserve it." He pulled off the mask and threw it to the ground. Tamara squeezed her eyes shut and twisted her head away from him, her mouth tightening. All Tycho could see was the back of his head. "There is no need to malinger," he said to her. "And now, please tell me what time you need."

"Uh . . . between twelve o'clock and one o'clock," she said faintly, picking up the thing on the counter.

The man made an adjustment on the device in his hand. So *that* was why he permitted Tamara to have her own duplicate of the egg! She couldn't use it to escape. It was under the control of the one in his pack.

Tamara pressed down on the green end and vanished. In an instant she returned, *holding another egg in her other hand.* She slipped it into a compartment in a large crate beside the counter. She pressed down on the green end and vanished, returning in a moment with another duplicate of the egg. She slipped it into a compartment and vanished again.

It took Tycho only a moment to figure out what she was doing. She was using the egg to make copies of itself. All

she had to do was leave it sitting on the counter between 12:00 and 1:00. Then, at a later time, she would go back to 12:59 and pick up the one that was there. She would bring it back, then go get the one at 12:58 and bring that one back. In this way she could easily make infinite copies of it. But for what reason? What was his older self going to do with all of them?

His older self, meanwhile, had mounted a dais at the back end of the room. In the kitchen, Tycho felt feverish and sick. Watching this little scene was like banging his head against a cement wall. He longed to get away. And yet something held him there. His older self had still not turned around. What was it that had made Tamara cringe when he removed the mask?

The adult Tycho plugged his control device into the wall. A video screen appeared out of nowhere. The shadowy shapes on it were meaningless and vague, and Tycho could make nothing of them. But his older self studied them intensely, occasionally making notes on a pad he had taken out of his pack. After several minutes, he turned off the screen and made some calculations. He went over them carefully. He thought for a moment, glanced at the pad again, and turned to Leonardo, as if to check on what he was doing. Then Tycho saw his face.

It was his own face, looking older than ever. But Tycho barely noticed the deep lines and thinning hair. A dark irregular stain, like a birthmark, wrinkled the skin from just below his left eye to the corner of his mouth. His lip withered where it met the stain, curving up slightly in a fixed sneer. It was his soul, printed on his face.

Tycho turned and ran from the kitchen. He pressed the

thing into the indentation in the door and hurried outside. He rushed around to the back of the house. He found the spot where the oak tree must have been, and placed himself well behind it. He checked the dials.

It was late afternoon. Deep shadows hung over the only growing thing left in the yard, a great unkempt hedge against the back fence. Just as he was about to jump, Tycho noticed that the leaves were quivering slightly. But there was no wind; the air was oppressively still. It was as though some large animal were moving inside the hedge, rustling the foliage. Then there was a kind of wet hiss and a snuffling sound.

Tycho returned to the oak tree and the night. And then he was sick on the grass.

# 14

He did not even attempt to get up for school the next day. Judy, after one look at him, ran for the thermometer. And even though he registered no fever, she stroked his head and insisted that he stay at home.

The others peered in on him, hushed and curious, before they left for school. "I hope you're not very sick." "I hope you don't feel really terrible," they murmured meekly. It was a relief when everyone finally went away and left him alone in his misery.

This future had been worse than anything he could have imagined. His older self was not merely sappy, or

criminal, or inhumanly cruel, as he had been before. He was insane. He was a demented monster who had turned the rest of his family into slaves.

And for what? To create that ugly raucous music and those repellent sculptures; to make endless copies of the egg? What was the purpose? What did he mean by "a new fabric in the earth, a new texture, a new doorway?" It was crazy. And why did he have to make them do it? Why couldn't he just leave them alone and go about his own lunatic business himself?

He lay in bed all morning, feeling dazed and sick, brooding over the implications. He had realized, and seen, that because of unpredictable chance events, everyone had many possible futures. And yet, though the futures he had visited were different in many respects, there was also something dreadfully similar about them all. There was some event that he had not managed to escape, that in every case had led him in the wrong direction. But what was it? Was it something he was stuck with, that was going to have an influence over all his futures? Or were there cases in which he had managed to avoid it?

What he had to do was carefully go over all the futures, and analyze what was similar about them. Only that way could he isolate the fatal event that was common to them all—the event which had to be avoided.

Now he knew better than to write anything down. But without the clarity and order of pencil and paper, the different trips spun confusingly in his head. They blurred together like dreams, until he could not tell one from the other. What was so frustrating was that he knew somehow that the event he sought was terribly obvious: that it was

staring him in the face. Yet as the hours went by, it continued to elude him.

He got up and paced around his room for a while. Then he wandered out into the upstairs hall, with its shiny green wallpaper, and into Bobby and Judy's room. There was a recent picture of the four children on Judy's desk. He picked it up and gazed at it abstractedly. Ludwig, with his short red hair. Tamara, the glittering braces showing through her shy smile. Fat, fat Leonardo. And Tycho himself, with that green splotch on his cheek from an experiment with his chemistry set.

Chemistry set? What chemistry set?

Something clicked in his head. He felt as though a cloud had lifted. For a split second he remembered a Ludwig with long black hair falling over his eyes, a Tamara without braces who was not shy at all, a Leonardo not nearly so fat, and a Tycho who had never had a chemistry set. Was it possible that his trips in time had already made changes in the present? Or was his older self in the future going back into its past and changing things that were affecting his present?

But then the cloud descended. The fuzziness, growing all too familiar now, sank back over his mind. Of course Ludwig had always had red hair. And his chemistry set was down in the basement. He had only made one little trip to the past, which couldn't have had much of an effect. And how could traveling to the future make changes in the present? He put the picture down slowly, telling himself to stop being so illogical. The answer to his problem was not to be found in the present and in his silly daydreams about his family. It was the future that he must be concerned with now.

But one thing at least had become clear. He needed additional data. The last three trips to the future were not enough. He had to have more information in order to discover the element that linked his futures. Even another bad future would provide him with plenty of useful material. And if he happened to end up in a good one, then the answer would be there for the taking, written all over everything he saw.

He would very likely be going into danger, subjecting himself to more brutality and ugliness. But that was a risk he had to take. Only by understanding what had made those terrible futures would he be able to prevent them. And to understand them, he needed to know more.

Once more he put on his traveling clothes and went out to the elm tree. He took the egg out of his pocket. The pictures inside the jewel shifted and changed. The beehive of cells now reached from the jewel to the dials, flickering on and off in busy, complex patterns. They were beautiful patterns that told a kind of story. He longed to watch and listen. But that would have to come later, after he had found the answer and could relax. Now he had important work to do. Last time he had stayed until five. He set the dials for six.

He closed his eyes. Just as he pressed down on the jewel, he remembered the noises in the bushes, as if some large animal were moving there. An unreasoning panic seized him. Then he felt faint.

In the moment that he opened his eyes, many things happened at once.

# 15

It was dusk. In the purple twilight, the yard was dim and full of green shadows. A heavy rotten smell hung in the motionless air.

The new addition sagged, full of large holes, soft around the edges like melted wax. Behind it loomed what was left of the house, half seen in the fading light. The roof was gone. Much of the exterior wall had crumbled away. Inside, broken glass and rubble filled the rooms. The furniture was blackened and ruined, the interior walls cracked and gaping. Little fires flickered delicately here and there. Exposed pipes gurgled and hissed.

An old man, Bobby, lay on the pavement beside the addition. Tamara sat near him. When she saw Tycho appear, she shrugged and looked away.

There was a footstep behind him. Someone grabbed his arms and pinioned them behind his back. Tycho's knees went weak with shock. He cried out. Tamara didn't even turn to look.

Escape! He had to get away from here! But the person behind him had a grip like iron. One hand held Tycho's wrists together, bending his arms back painfully. Another hand was prying his fingers open, trying to get the egg away from him.

"No!" Tycho screamed. The weakness left him. He struggled violently, twisting his body, kicking out with his feet. The person behind tightened his grip, grunting. He wrenched Tycho's arms back into an even more excruciating position. Tycho bellowed in pain and kicked back with all his strength. Then something grabbed him by the ankles and he went over. The pain in his arms made him helpless. His grip weakened. The egg slipped out of his grasp. Instantly his arms were dropped.

For a moment Tycho lay there limply on his stomach, gasping, as the pain ebbed. He was stunned by the suddenness of what had happened. But quickly realization came flooding back. Someone had taken the egg! He staggered to his feet.

And came face to face with his older self. The man was bent over from the weight of the pack on his back, but he was smiling pleasantly. Little green growths were sprouting out of the stain on his face. He held the egg he had taken from Tycho in his hand.

"No! Give it back!" Tycho screamed, and grabbed for it.

But his older self stepped quickly away. He held the egg up out of Tycho's reach and gazed at it. "Yes," he murmured. "I remember this stage. Just beginning to get nice."

"But you can't do this!" Tycho cried, and jumped for it.

But his older self was too fast for him. He reached behind and dropped it into his pack. The pack sealed itself shut. Tycho grabbed the pack. A terrible feeling, more painful than an electric shock, seared his hands and raced through his body. He collapsed onto the ground.

His older self stood over him, looking down. His grotesque face was blank now, empty, almost simpleminded. He scratched his head vaguely.

"But why?" Tycho said, half sobbing, feeling tears welling out of his eyes. "Why . . . why do you want me here? Why can't I just take it and go away?"

The ugly man shook his head. "Oh, no. I can't let you do that. It wouldn't be safe."

"Safe?" Tycho moaned. "But all I want to do is go away from here. What could I do to harm you?"

The man's face hardened. "You could change things. You could go back and make it different. After I've worked so hard. You could ruin everything."

"Ruin everything?" Tycho repeated, totally bewildered. He pushed himself to his feet and gestured at the house. "But just look around you. Everything already *is* ruined. How could I do *anything* worse than this?"

"Oh, no. You don't understand." His older self smiled faintly and shook his head, as if he were talking to a very

stupid child. "This is what they want. This is what they like. This is what they told me to do. And it's almost ready now." His smile widened. "Soon. They'll be here very soon. And I did it all. I opened the way for them. I did what they told me."

"But . . ." Hopeless, Tycho stared up into his future face. How could he argue with him? There was no reason there. All that was left of him was a kind of doglike loyalty and devotion. To what? To the thing he carried on his back? To the messages he heard from it? He, and not his family, was the real slave.

There was no point in trying to change his mind. He couldn't undo the influence of twenty years. But perhaps he still had a chance to escape. It was the word *slave* that made him remember the last future and gave him an idea. Tamara had been making duplicates of the egg. Perhaps she had done that in this future too. And then he could get one from her and get out of here.

He left himself staring hopefully up at the darkening sky and hurried over to where she sat. She had Bobby's bald, wrinkled head in her lap and was stroking it softly.

"Tamara," he said. "Look at me. Do you know who I am?"

She looked at him briefly, without interest. "Go away, little boy," she said wearily.

"But Tamara! Don't you recognize me? I'm Tycho, eleven-year-old Tycho. You have to help me."

"Don't be ridiculous," she said. "*He* never looked like that."

"Tamara, just listen," he pleaded. "I really am Tycho. I came from the past, with a thing like he has, to travel

through time. And he took it away from me and I'm stuck here. But I saw you making duplicates of it, once. If you gave me one and I got away, I could change things, and save us, and this would never happen."

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said. "I don't know what it is you want from me, and I can't help you. Just leave us alone."

"Tamara, please. You *have* to believe me!"

"If you don't go away now, I'll get that man over there to take you away," she said angrily. "He's strong. I'll tell him to hurt you."

Tycho turned and glanced at his older self—and saw him vanish. Obviously he had just departed on some detestable errand in time. Tycho turned back to Tamara. "All right, you don't believe me," he said. "But what about Ludwig and Leonardo? Where are they?"

"Who are they?" she said. "I never heard of them."

"You never . . . But they're your *brothers*!" he cried, spreading his arms. "You *must* know them!"

"I have only one brother," she said harshly. "And now I'm going to tell him to come over here and . . ."

Then her voice faded. And with it faded her dress, and her hands, and her face. A dim, smoky filter passed across the world. Tamara was not there. She had never been there.

"Tamara!" he moaned, backing away. "Tamara! Don't. . . ."

"There is no Tamara," croaked the old man lying on the ground.

And in that moment of horror the answer, all at once, slid into place. The common element that linked all the futures he had seen was revealed to him. It was the egg.

Of course it was obvious. So obvious that he had not realized it until now, when it was too late. Any future that it took him to would *have* to include it. In every future he had it with him, he used it, he depended on it. And it was more than just a time travel device. He didn't know what its other functions were, or what his older self was trying to do to the world, or what he meant by *they*. He didn't even know whether it was really evil, or just too subtle and sophisticated a tool for a human being to handle.

What he did know was that it had done terrible things to him. It was at the root of all the miserable futures he had seen. And there was only one way to prevent those futures from coming true. It was maddeningly simple. He had merely to go back and change things so that he would never find it.

But how? He would never be able to get away from his older self now. He was trapped here, in this hideous, stinking world he had created. And it was his own fault, for being so stupid. If he had thought of it only fifteen minutes ago, it would have made all the difference. He could have gotten rid of it, and cleansed himself and the future of its influence. Now it was too late.

Something pressed against his arm. He spun around. It was his older self, returned from his errand, standing beside him. The man looked down at Bobby, lying on the ground and breathing shallowly. He prodded Bobby with his big foot, as though he were a piece of trash. "They don't like him," he murmured. And then he turned from Bobby and his eyes met Tycho's. One of them was half closed by a new green thing sprouting just above it. "They don't like you, either," he said softly.

Tycho took a step backwards. "What happened to Tamara?" he said.

"Tamara? Who's that?" said his older self, his mouth twitching as though he were trying not to laugh.

"You know who I mean!" Tycho shouted. "You can't pretend to me. She was our sister. And you just went back and did something to get rid of her. What did you do? Fix it so she was never born?"

"Oh, no, that's much too complicated," the man said complacently. "She died when she was two. She drowned in the bathtub."

Tycho felt numbness growing in his stomach. He moved farther away from the creature he had become. "You mean . . . you went back and . . . killed her? When she was two?"

"It had to happen," the man said, sounding quite reasonable. "If she had lived, she would have been in the way." He moved close to Tycho again. The smell of him was vile. "In the way, like you are now."

"But you can't do anything to *me*," Tycho said, shaking his head. "I mean, I'm *you*. A younger version of you. We're the same person!" He gestured with his hands, trying to get through to him. "If you get rid of me, then you'll be getting rid of yourself. Don't you see? If I don't exist, then you won't exist either. If you kill me, you'll never grow up. You just can't do it!"

"But there are other things I can do," murmured his older self.

Tycho turned and ran for the house. In another flash, one last idea had come to him, one final shred of hope. The time Ludwig had found the egg in his room, and he had made a quick trip back to change things so that Lud-

wig would not find it. In doing so, he had generated a duplicate of the egg. He had kicked it into the closet, out of Ludwig's view. And he had left it there.

His older self, after a moment of indecision, took off after him. Tycho jumped through one of the holes in the addition. Inside, the floor was soft, sticky, slowing him down. He squelched through it, trying not to breathe the horrible smell, up the ramp to the kitchen.

Was it possible that the egg was still there, in the back of the closet, after twenty years? That Judy had not swept it away? That Ludwig had not found it again? That he himself had forgotten it, and not hidden it somewhere else? The chance was small, appallingly small. But it was his only chance.

The liquid filth on the kitchen floor was several inches deep. More brackish stuff gurgled out of the overflowing sink. Tycho splashed through it and started up the stairs. He could hear his older self grunting only a few yards behind. His legs were longer; if it were not for the weight of the pack on his back, he would have overtaken him already.

At the top of the flight there were three missing steps. Tycho took a deep breath and leapt over the gap. He landed—and his right foot went through a hole in the floor. He ripped it out, twisting his ankle painfully. The going was treacherous here: piles of rubble hiding the missing floorboards. It was also too dark to see anything very clearly, but he plunged ahead recklessly, hoping not to fall again. He kicked aside an old doll of Tamara's—a ballerina doll, blackened and headless now—and limped into his room.

And cried out in pain, as his hopes vanished.

The room was empty. The bed, the desk, all the furniture was gone. There was only a bare floor, buried under broken glass and wet plaster and ashes. Someone *must* have found the thing when the room had been emptied.

But he couldn't give up, not while he could still think and move. He raced to the closet, sank to his knees, and began sifting frantically through the debris. In a moment his hands were bleeding, but he didn't notice. He tossed aside a melted telephone and a charred edition of Yeats, a transistor radio and a postcard from Hawaii.

Behind him, heavy footsteps crunched through the trash. There was a gulping snort and two large damp hands closed around his neck.

"No, you can't! You'll just be killing yourself!" Tycho gasped, barely able to get the words out through the sudden pressure on his throat. And then, against all reason, his own hands closed around something familiar in the dust.

His older self let go of his neck, kicked him brutally in the side of the head, and reached for the egg.

But Tycho had already spun the dials, without even looking: backward into the past, anywhere. He pressed down on the jewel.

"Where did you come from?" someone bellowed, and the bedside light went on. Tycho lifted his head weakly to see who it was. There were two people in the bed.

"Oh, sorry," Tycho said, not even able to be embarrassed. "I didn't mean to—"

And then his older self flashed into the room. The controls were clenched in his hand, and his eyes were fixed on the exact spot where Tycho lay.

But that was impossible! How could his older self have found the precise moment that Tycho had so randomly escaped to? It must be just a ghastly coincidence. Tycho spun the dials and jumped again.

Sunlight streamed into the room. Ludwig, in his twenties, sat at the desk, talking to Leonardo, who stood in the doorway. ". . . must be a diary," Ludwig was saying. "Wait until you hear what he says about—"

Then they both yelled as Tycho's older self appeared and started toward him. But it was impossible! How could he keep finding him this way? Tycho twisted the dials farther than before and pressed down.

". . . with this power I can tell the future," he heard himself saying.

"Cut it out, Tycho," said Leonardo. Then Leonardo saw young Tycho appear, and went pale.

Tycho stumbled to his feet and pushed his way out of the room. He had to get outside so he wouldn't keep bumping into people and would have time to figure out what was happening. Behind him, his older self tramped noisily down the stairs.

It wasn't coincidence. The egg had grown over the years, becoming more complex and more versatile. The tool his older self had could do many different things. It must have some kind of homing device in it, that could trace the energy released when Tycho used the egg that he had, and follow it anywhere. With a horrible sinking feeling, Tycho realized that he had not yet even begun to escape. He would only be safe when he had got rid of the egg for good.

He raced out to the maple tree and leaned against it,

panting. There was only one way to escape from his older self, one way to eliminate those terrible futures. He had to go back to before he found the egg and take it away. Then he would never find it. It would never poison his life and his future. None of this would ever happen.

His older self was hurtling toward him across the lawn. He had to go, this instant. But how far? He didn't know the date or the time where he was now. He was too frantic to calculate. What was he going to do?

Then he noticed the freshly dug vegetable garden. That was it! It was really very simple. All he had to do was go back before he started the garden, dig up the egg and throw it away. Then he would never find it. And that had been less than a week before that talk with Leonardo. He spun the dials back a week and jumped.

Then he was down on his knees, clawing at the earth. Where was the exact spot? How deep had it been? Why wasn't it there? He had to hurry, before his older self showed up.

Then the earth dropped from his hands as another thought smote him. He sat up. Once he did find it, what was he going to do with it? Throw it into the next yard, or across the street? Flush it down the toilet? What good would that do? All that would happen was that someone else would find it. Perhaps Tycho and his family would be safe, for a while. But another person would still be influenced by it. And what would stop *him* from doing dangerous things to the world?

"No, no, you can't do that!" his older self screamed harshly. Tycho was too late to escape another agonizing kick in the head. But he did have an instant to flip the

dials back a few more years and press down on the jewel.

He pushed himself to his feet and staggered a few paces across the lawn, just to be out of reach of his older self when he appeared. He didn't pay any attention to the three children who were taunting another little boy. His head hurt so much now that he could barely think. And he didn't have much time.

Where had the egg come from, originally? It hadn't just burst into existence, out of nothing. Someone—or something—must have put it there. It was odd that he had never wondered about it before. Now the question of its origin suddenly assumed gigantic importance. The only way to save the world from it was to go back and return it to whatever had brought it in the first place. "No thank you, we don't want it," he heard himself saying, idiotically.

His older self, hulking and demented, surged furiously toward him. Tycho held the egg up to his eye and spun the second most powerful dial, the one for centuries. He had never used it before. He pressed down on the jewel and felt faint.

He was standing on a vast, featureless plain. It was dawn. Tall grasses bowed against the wind in all directions. A group of large dark animals grazed several hundred yards to his left.

But when *had* the egg made its first appearance on the earth? In order to give it back, he had to pinpoint the exact moment of its arrival. With all the aeons at his disposal, there was no hope that he would stumble accidentally upon that moment. He felt himself go weak under

another onslaught of hopelessness. It was impossible to get rid of it. Unless . . .

His older self barreled toward him, hands outstretched. "What . . . When . . . What are you doing?"

Tycho spun the dial and pressed. He was up to his waist in warm water. The slimy ooze under his feet was like quicksand, sucking him inexorably down. He couldn't stay here very long. But he needed a moment to think.

What if it was impossible for the egg to take him back before its arrival on the earth? There was a certain logic to that. If there was any limit to how far back it could go, then its own existence in this space would have to be that limit. Wouldn't it?

The mud was up to his knees now and the water lapped greasily around his neck. Something moved against his stomach.

It had to be the answer! In order to reach the moment it had come here, he would make it take him back as far as it could go. It was the only hope of getting rid of it. All he had to do was—

Then he was choking as the muddy water flowed into his lungs. His older self must be sitting on him, holding him under with his whole body, because there were two powerful hands grappling with him for the egg. Tycho fought the instinct to breathe. He kicked, he thrashed, and he felt for the inner dial, the most powerful dial, turning. The dial for millennia. There was water in his lungs but he couldn't spit it out because he would only breathe in more water. He felt like he was going to explode. He kept on spinning the middle dial, back, back, farther back. The enormity of the time span underneath his fin-

gertips was more frightening than anything else. Was it ever going to stop?

Then it was being torn out of his hand. But the dial clicked into position and would not move. Tycho pressed down on the jewel and felt very faint indeed.

# 16

Unfortunately, Tycho had no time to get a good look at the brontosaurus.

He was lying in hot, stinking mud. A heavy mist hung over the world, dimming the intense orange glare of a gigantic sun billowing angrily on the horizon. The air was thick and strange, unpleasant to breathe. But at least it was not water. He inhaled deeply.

Just in front of him, a being moved through the swamp. Tycho shook the water out of his eyes. There was a group of the creatures, and the one near him was the last in line. It was green. It had veiny, wrinkled bumps on its body,

and little snoutlike protuberances. Where had he seen something like it before?

Its only garment was a kind of metallic purse with many pouches and pockets. It had taken something out of one of the pouches and was in the act of dropping it to the ground. Something very plain, and gray, and vaguely egg-shaped. It bore very little resemblance to the glittering object in Tycho's hand.

Tycho reached for it as it landed in the mud. Almost as if it were alive, it wriggled away from him, seeking to bury itself in the slime. Tycho's hand went after it. But it was slippery and squirmed out of his fingers.

Tycho wanted to cry out in frustration. But he couldn't let the being know he was there. He struck the jewel into his mouth and clenched it in his teeth. He plunged his other hand into the mud and firmly cupped the egg in both his palms. He scooped it up out of the swamp.

Then his older self was breathing heavily behind him. He felt the beginnings of pressure on his elbows, holding back his arms. Ahead of him, the being was moving away.

With one final burst of strength, Tycho broke free. He stretched out his arms. Wondering what was going to happen next, he dropped the egg back into the pouch from which it had been taken.

Everything went black.

# EPILOGUE

It fell from the shovel and lay glinting on the grass, shiny and new and bright as a polished silver spoon. The metallic sheen of its surface caught the morning light and sent it dazzling directly into Tycho's eyes—or else he might not have noticed it at all.

He bent over and picked it up, then bounced it casually in his palm, "Weird," he murmured. But his mind was on tomatoes and zucchini, and this thing was not quite weird enough to distract him for long. He started to slip it into his pocket.

Tamara, on her knees beside him, sat back and brushed

off her hands. The vegetable garden was her project too; they were sharing it. "What did you dig up, Tyke?" she asked him.

"Nothing much," he said. He dropped it into her outstretched palm.

She studied it for a moment. "Oh, I know what it is," she said. "It's just an old empty lipstick tube." She opened the lipstick tube and shook the dirt out, then closed it and handed it back to him. "You don't really want to keep it, do you?"

Something stirred deep inside his brain, something unpleasant. What had made him start to put it in his pocket? He didn't want the worthless piece of junk. "Want it? Are you kidding?" he said. "Let's see if I can hit the trash can from here." He aimed carefully and pitched it across the yard. It went into the trash can with a delicate little *ping*.

"I can't wait until we get this garden planted," Tamara said, picking up the trowel again. "So what if Ludwig and Leonardo think it's a waste of time? They'll be eating our tomatoes when the time comes, won't they, Tyke?"

"Sure they will," Tycho said. "Too bad we can't make the summer go by in one second. Then we'd be eating them right now."

"The summer will go by fast enough," Tamara said. "It always does."

"That's for sure," Tycho said. Why did he feel so happy all of a sudden? It must be just the beautiful weather. Whistling, he pushed the shovel into the earth.